SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LA HABANA

Novels by Joseph Hergesheimer

The Three Black Pennys
Java Head
Gold and Iron
Linda Condon
The Happy End
Mountain Blood
The Lay Anthony

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SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LA HABANA

BY

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

"Many yeeres since I had knowledge by relation of that great and golden Citie which the Spaniards call El Dorado."

SIR WALTER RALEGH.

187062.
25.1.24.

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To

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AN

HAVANA

WHICH HE IS FREE

TO DECLINE IN EVERY PARTICULAR

SAVE THE

DEDICATION

SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LA HABANA

THERE are certain cities, strange to the first view, nearer the heart than home. But it might be better to acknowledge that perhaps the word "home" has a wider and deeper significance than any mere geographical and family setting. Many men are alien in houses built from the traditions of their blood; the most inaccessible and obdurate parts of the earth have always been restlessly sought by individuals not driven so much by exterior pressure as by a strange necessity to inhabit a barren copper mountain, a fever coast, or follow to the end of life a river lost in a savage remoteness, hiding the secret of their unquenchable longing.

Not this, precisely, happened to me, approaching Havana in the early morning, nothing so tyrannical and absolute; yet, watching the silver greenness of Cuba rising from the blue sea, I had a premonition that what I saw was of peculiar importance to me. I grew at once impatient and sharply intent on the resolving of a nebulous and

verdant mass into the details of dense slopes, slopes that showed, from the sea to their crowns, no break in a dark foliage. The sombreness of the leaves immediately marked the land from an accustomed region of bright maples; they were at once dark, glossy, and heavy—an effect I had often tried to describe—and their presence in such utter expanses filled me with pleasure. It was exactly as though the smooth, lustrous hills before me had been created out of an old mysterious desire to realize them in words.

Undoubtedly their effect belonged to the sea, the sky, and the hour in which they were set. The plane of the sea, ruffled by a wind like a wilful and contrarily exerted force, was so blue that it was unsatisfactory—the intensity of its colour was black, while the veils of space were dissolved in arcs of expanding light. The island seemed unusually solid and isolated, as complete within itself as a flower in air, and saturated with romance. That was my immediate feeling about Cuba, taking on depth across water profounder than indigo . . . it was latent with the emotional distinction which so signally stirred me to write.

At once, in imagination, I saw the ineffable bay of Guatanago, where buccaneers careened their ships, and, in a town of pink stucco and windows with projecting wooden grilles, drank and took for figureheads the sacred images of churches painted

blue. On the shore, under a canopy of silk, a woman, naked but for a twist of bishop's purple, bound her hair in gold cloth. From where she stood, in dyed shadow, a figure only less golden than the cloth, she heard the hollow ring of the calking malls and the harsh rustle of the palms. Drawing rapidly nearer to what was evidently the entrance to the harbour of Havana, I considered the possibilities of such a story, such a character:

She had her existence in the seventeenth century, when Morgan marched inland to rape Camagüey—the daughter, without doubt, of a captain of the Armada de Barlevento, the windward fleet, and a native woman taken in violence; a shameless wench with primitive feelings enormously complicated by the heritage of Spain's civilization; a murderous, sullen, passionate slip, wholly treacherous and instinct with ferine curiosity. The master for her, I decided, must come from the Court of Charles, the London of the Cavalier Parliament, a gentleman in a gay foppery masking a steel eaten by a cruelty like a secret poison. It would be a story bright with the flames of hell and violent as a hurricane; the pages would reflect the glare of the sand scrawled with cocoanut palms, and banked with mangroves; while, at the end, the bishop's purple would be a cerecloth and the gallows chains sound in Xaymaca. But, above everything else, it would be modern in

psychology and colour treatment, written with that realism for which the only excuse was to provide a more exact verisimilitude for romance.

The Cuban shore was now so close, Havana so imminent, that I lost my story in a new interest; I could see low against the water a line of white buildings, at that distance purely classic in implication. Then it was that I had my first premonition about the city toward which I was smoothly progressing—I was to find in it the classic spirit not of Greece but of a late period; it was the replica of those imagined cities painted and engraved in a wealth of marble cornices and set directly against the tranquil sea. There was already perceptible about it the air of unreality that marked the strand which saw the Embarkation for Cytheria.

Nothing could have made me happier than this realization; it was precisely as though a haunting dream were turned into a solid fact. The buildings multiplied to the sight, bathed in a glamorous radiance; when, suddenly, on the other hand, rose Morro Castle. That structure, small and compact and remarkably like its numerous pictures, gave me a distinct feeling of disappointment. Its importance was historic rather than visible, and needed, for appreciation, a different mind from mine. But the narrowness of the harbour entrance, a deep thrust of blue extending crookedly into the land, the sense of crowded shipping and massed

city, the steamers of the world, and broad, shaded avenues at my elbow, impressed me at once with Havana's unique personality.

Nothing, however, was more ingratiating than the long coraline limestone wall of the Cabañas on its sear, abrupt hill at the left; ponderous and stained brilliantly pink by time, it formed a miraculous complement for the pseudo-classic whiteness below. A sea-wall built into a wide promenade followed the shore, there was a circular pavilion on a flagged plaza piled with iron chairs, the docks were interspersed with small public gardens under royal palms, and everywhere the high windows had ornamental balconies empty in the morning sun. I heard, then, the voice of Havana, a remarkably active staccato voice, never, I was to learn, sinking to quiet, but changing at night into a different yet no less disturbing clamour.

What I tried to discover, rushed through broad avenues and streets hardly more than passage-ways, was the special characteristic of the city which had already possessed me. And, ignorant of the instantaneous process that formed the words, I told myself that it was a mid-Victorian Pompeii. This was a modification of my first impression, a truer approximation, for it expressed the totality of marble façades inadmissible architecturally, yet together holding a surprising and pleasant unity. No one, I thought excitedly, had ever rightly

appreciated Havana; it required a very involved understanding, a feeling not entirely admirable. No, it wasn't Hellenic, not what might be called in the first manner; it hadn't the simplicity of great spirit, a true epoch; Havana was artificial, exotic; Spain touched everywhere by the tropics: the tropics, without a tradition, built into a semblance of the baroque.

It was rococo, and I liked it; an admission, I believe, laying me open to certain charges, for the rococo was universally damned; the Victorian period had been equally condemned . . . and I liked it. Why, God knew! Ornament without use, without reference to its surface and purpose, invited contempt. A woman in a hoop skirt was an absurdity, black walnut furniture carved and gilded beyond recognition, nonsense. Yet they had my warm attachment. Havana claimed me for its own—a city where I could sit at tables in the open and gaze at parterres of flowers and palms and statues and fountains; where, in the evening, a band played the light arias of La Belle Helène.

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To illustrate further the perversity of my impulses, I was so entirely captivated by the Hôtel Inglaterra that, for the rest of the day, I was indifferent to whatever might be waiting outside. The deep entrance with its reflected planes of

subdued light and servants in cool linen; the patio with water, its white arches on iridescent tiles; the dining-room laid in marble, panelled with the arms of Pontius Pilate, the bronze lustre of the tiling, and the long windows on the Parque exactly as I had anticipated, all created a happy effect of Spain in the tropics. The corridor on which my room opened was still more entrancing, its arches filled with green lattice-work, and an octagonal space set with chairs and long-bladed plants.

Yet the room itself, perhaps one of the most remarkable rooms in the world, easily surpassed what, until then, I had seen. There were slatted door screens, cream-coloured with a sapphire-blue glass knob, topped in an elaborate Gothic scrolling; and the door beyond, inconceivably tall, opened on an interior that seemed to reach upward without any limit. It had, of course, a ceiling, heavily beamed in dark wood; and when, later, I speculated carefully on its height, I reached the conclusion that it was twenty-five feet above the grey-flowered tiling of the floor. The walls were bare, white; about their base was laid a line of green glazed tiles; and this, except for the glass above the French window, was the only positive note.

The window, too, towered with the dignity of an impressive entrance; there were two sets of shutters, the inner elaborately slatted, and over it was a semicircular fanlight of intensely brilliant colours—

carmine and orange and plum-purple, cobalt and yellow. It was extraordinarily vivid, like heaped gorgeous fruit: throughout the day it dominated the closed, elusive interior; and not only from its place on high, for the sun, moving across that exposure, cast its exact replica on the floor, over the frigidity of the austere iron bed, down one wall and up another.

It was fascinating merely to sit and watch that chromatic splash, the violent colour, shift with the afternoon, to surrender the mind to its suggestions. . . . They, as well, were singularly bright and illogical. Such glass, such colours, had been discarded from present decorative schemes; but I recalled hints of it in the houses of eighteen seventy; I seemed to remember it in pagoda-like conservatories, and at once a memory of my childhood returned. Not that there were actually such windows at Woodnest, sombre under the tulip-poplars; yet the impression of one recreated the feeling of the other—it brought back disturbingly a vanished time . . . dead figures.

Havana was identified as an authentic part of my inheritance; I was—in a purely inner manner—to understand it, to have for it the affectionate recognition, the sense of familiarity, of which I have already spoken. The city was wholly expressed by the fanlight sparkling with the shifting radiance of the blazing day. It was possible,

without leaving the room, to grasp the essential spirit of the place so largely unseen. Then it occurred to me that, indeed, I had seen Havana, and that the wisest thing to do was to leave at once, to go back with my strong feeling uncontaminated by trivial facts; but a more commonplace impulse, a limiting materialism, pointed out that, since I had come away for a change of scene, I had best realize a semblance of my intention. Still those colours, like a bouquet of translucent tulips, easily outweighed in importance all that I subsequently gained; they gave the emotional pitch, the intellectual note, of whatever followed—a mood, an entire existence, into which I walked with the turning of a sapphire-blue knob.

For the rest the furniture was scant: a walnut bureau with a long mirror, necessary chairs, and an adequate bathroom like a shaft with shining silver faucets at its bottom. From outside, even through the heat of noon, the sustained activity of sound floated up through the shutters—the incomplete blending of harsh traffic alarms and blurred cries announcing newspapers.

It was later when I went out on my balcony: across the narrow depth of San Rafael Street the ornamented bulk of the Gallego Club—the Club and the Opera House in one—opposed a corner against the sweep of the Parque Central; and to the right, between the glitter of shop windows,

poured an unbroken procession of motors. A great pillar of the Paseo below was hung with gaily covered magazines; a bootblack, wrinkled and active, with a single chair on a high stand, was cleaning a row of white shoes, obviously from the hotel; and the newsboys were calling *La Politica Comica* in a long-drawn minor inflection.

The sun, that I had seen rising on the undiscovered hills of Cuba, was sinking behind the apprehended city; it touched the caryatids of the Gallego Club and enveloped, in a diminished gold like a fine suffusion of precious dust, the circular avenue, the royal palms, the flambeau trees, and Indian laurels of the plaza. The whiteness of the buildings, practically unbroken, everywhere took on the tone of every moment; now they were faintly aureate, as though they had been lightly touched by a gilder's brush; the diffused shadows were violet; the shadows slowly thickened and merged; they seemed to swell upward from the streets, the Parque; and the buildings, in turn, became lavender, and then, again, a glimmering white. Only the lifted green of the palms was changeless, positive until it was lost in darkness.

A great many people appeared below, moving with an air of determination on definite ways. The faces of the men were darkened by the contrast of their linen; I couldn't see their features; but what struck me at once was the fact that there

were, practically, no women along the streets. It was a tide of men. This, at first, gave me an impression of monotony, of stupidity—women were an absolute essential to the variety of any spectacle; and here, except for an occasional family group hurrying to a café, a rare, stolid shape, they were utterly lacking.

The reason, however, quickly followed the observed truth—this was, in spirit, Spain, and Spain was saturated with Morocco, a land where women, even the poorest, were never publicly exhibited. Havana was a city of balconies, of barred windows, of houses impenetrable, blank to the streets, but open on the garden rooms of patios. And suddenly—while the moment before I had been impatient at the bareness resulting from their absence—I was overwhelmingly conscious of the pervading influence of charming women. Here they were infinitely more appealing than in places where they were set out in the rows of a market, sometimes like flowers, but more often resembling turnips and squashes. Here, with extreme flattery, women were regarded as dangerous, as always desirable, and capable of folly.

It was a society where a camellia caught in the hair, a brilliant glance across a powdered cheek, lace drawn over a vivid mouth, were not for nothing. In the world from which I had come these gestures, beauties, existed; but they were

general and meaningless rather than special, the expression of a conventional vanity without warmth. There was an agreement that anyone might look, the intensest gaze was invited, with the understanding that almost none should desire; and a cloak of hypocrisy had been the result; either that or the beauty was mechanical, the gesture furtive and hard.

For Havana a woman was, in principle, a flower with delicate petals easily scattered, a perfume not to be rudely, indiscriminately, spent; a rose, it was the implication, had its moment, its perfection of eager, flushed loveliness, during which what man would not reach out his hand ? After that . . . but the seedpods were carefully, jealously, tended. And here, in addition to so much else, was another shared attitude drawing me toward Havana—an enormous preference for women who had the courage of their emotions over those completely circumspect except in situations morally and financially solid.

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My dressing for dinner I delayed luxuriously, smoking the last Dimitrino cigarette found in a pocket, and leaving the wet prints of my feet on the polished tiles of the floor. I was glad that I brought a trunk, variously filled, in place of merely a bag, as I might have done; for it was evident

that Havana required many changes of clothes. It was a city which to enjoy demanded a meticulous attention to trifles. For one thing, it was going to be hot: April was well advanced; and the arcades, the brightly illuminated open cafés, the thronged Prado and operatic Malecon, the general air of tropical expensiveness, insisted on the ornamental fitness of its idlers.

I debated comfortably the security of a dinner coat, slightly varied, perhaps, by white flannels; but in the end decided in favour of a more informal jacket of Chinese silk with the flannels. A shirt, the socks and scarf, were objects of separate importance; but when they were combined there was a prevailing shade of green. . . . I had no inclination to apologize for lingering over these details, but it might be necessary to warn the seekers after noble truisms that I had no part in their righteous purpose. Even noble truths, in their popular definitions, had never been a part of my concern: at the beginning I was hopelessly removed from them, and what was an instinct had become, in an experience of life not without supporting evidence, the firmest possible attitude. A tone of candour, if my reflections were to have the slightest interest or value, was my first necessity; and candour compelled me to admit that I thought seriously about the jacket which finally slipped smoothly over my shoulders.

It was an undeniable fact that I was newly in a land of enormous interest, and which, just then, held the most significant and valuable crop growing on earth. But that didn't detain my imagination for a moment. The Havana that delighted me, into which I found myself so happily projected, was a city of promenading and posted theatre programmes, of dinners and drinks and fragrant cigars. I was aware that from such things I might, in the end, profit; but I'd get nothing, nothing in the world, from stereotyped sentiments and places and solemn gabbled information.

On top of this I had a fixed belief in the actual importance of, say, a necktie—for myself, of course; I was not referring to the neckties of the novelists with a mission, lost in the dilemma of elevating mankind. A black string, or none at all, served their superiority. But for the light-minded the claim of a Bombay foulard against the solider shade of an Irish poplin was a delicate question; for the light-minded the choice of one word in preference to another—entirely beneath the plane of a mission—was a business for blood, an overt act. And with me there was a correspondence between the two, a personal exterior as nicely selected as possible and the mental attitude capable of exquisite choice in diction. But this was no more than a development of all that I first admitted, a repetition of my pleasure at being in

Havana, a place where the election of a cocktail was invested with gravity. And, carefully finished except for the flower I'd get below, I was carefully in harmony with the envelopment, the adventure, to which my persistent good luck had brought me.

The elevator going down was burdened with expensive women, their bodies delicately evident under clinging, fragile materials, their powdered throats hung with the clotted iridescence of pearls; the cage was filled with soft breathing and faint, provocative perfumes—the special lure of flowers which Nature had denied to them as women. It was, I told myself, all very reprehensible and delightful.

Here were creatures anatomically planned for the sole end of maternity who had wilfully—wisely, I felt—elevated the mere preliminary of their purpose to the position of its whole consummation. More intoxicated by sheer charm than by the bearing of children, resentful of the thickened ankles of their immemorial duty, they proclaimed by every enhanced and seductive curve that their intention was magnetic rather than economic. They were, however, women of my own land, secure in that convention which permitted them exposure with immunity; and here, in Havana, they failed to interest me; their voices, too, were sharp, irritable; and even in the contracted space of the elevator their elaborate backs were so

brutally turned on the men with them—men correct enough except for their studs—the hard feminine tyranny of the chivalrous United States was so starkly upheld, that I escaped with a sigh of relief into a totally different atmosphere.

The lower hall, the patio and dining-room on the left, were brilliant with life, the wing-like flutter of fans; and it would be necessary, I saw, to have my cocktail in the patio; but before that, following a purely instinctive course, I walked out to the paseo in front of the hotel. The white buildings beyond the dark foliage of the Parque were coruscant with electric signs, and, their utilitarian purpose masked in an unfamiliar language, they shared, with the alabaster of the façades, the high fronds of the royal palms and monument to Marti, in the tropical, the classic romanticism.

Hardly had I appeared, gazing down the illuminated arcade, when a man approached me with a flat, wide basket of flowers. There were, inevitably, roses—tea roses, as pale as the yellow of champagne; gardenias, so smooth and white that they seemed unreal, heavy with odour: those I had expected; but what surprised me were some sprigs of orange blossom with an indefinite sweetness that was yet perceptible above the thicker scents. I chose the latter immediately, and the flower vendor, wholly comprehensive of my mood, placed

the boutonnière in my jacket. The moment, now, had arrived for a Daiquiri: seated near the cool dip of the fountain, where a slight stir of air seemed to ruffle the fringed mantone of a bronze dancing Andalusian girl, I lingered over the frigid mixture of Ron Bacardi, sugar, and a fresh, vivid green lime.

It was a delicate compound, not so good as I was to discover later at the Telegrafo, but still a revelation, and I was devoutly thankful to be sitting, at that hour, in the Inglaterra with such a drink. It elevated my contentment to an even higher pitch; and, with a detached amusement, I recalled the fact that farther north prohibition was formally in effect. Unquestionably the cocktail on my table was a dangerous agent, for it held, in its shallow glass bowl slightly encrusted with undissolved sugar, the power of a contemptuous indifference to fate; it set the mind free of responsibility; obliterating both memory and to-morrow, it gave the heart an adventitious feeling of superiority and momentarily vanquished all the celebrated, the eternal fears.

Yes, that was the danger of skilfully prepared intoxicating drinks. . . . The word "intoxicating" adequately expressed their power, their menace to orderly, monotonous resignation. A word, I thought further, debased by moralists from its primary ecstatic content. Intoxication

with Ron Bacardi, with May, with passion, was a state threatening to privilege, abhorrent to authority. And since the dull were so fatally in the majority they had succeeded in attaching a heavy penalty to whatever lay outside their lymphatic understanding. They had, as well, made the term "gay" an accusation before their Lord, confounding it with loose, so that now a gay girl—certainly the only girl worth a ribbon or the least devotion—was one bearing upon her graceful figure, for she was apt to be reprehensibly graceful, the censure of a society open to any charge other than that of gaiety in either of its meanings. A ridiculous, a tragic, conclusion, I told myself indifferently: but then, with a fresh Daiquiri and a sprig of orange blossom in my buttonhole, it meant less than nothing. It grew cooler, and an augmented stir set in motion toward the dining-room where the files of damask-spread tables held polished silver water-bottles and sugar in crystal jars with spouts.

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The wisdom of the attention I had given to my appearance was at once evident in the table to which the head waiter conducted me. Small and reserved with a canted chair, it was directly at one of the long windows on the Parque Central. This, at first sight, on the part of its arbiter, would not

have been merely an affair for money—he had his eye on the effect of the dining-room as a whole, as an expanse of the utmost decorative correctness, and there were a number of men with quite pretty women—a great asset publicly—who had been given places in the centre of the room. Yes, where I was seated the ruffled curtains were swayed by the night breeze almost against my chair, a brilliant section of the plaza was directly at my shoulder, and I was pervaded by the essential feeling of having the best possible situation.

This was not, perhaps, true of characters more admirable than mine, but if I had been seated behind one of the pillars, buried in an obscure angle, my spirits would have suffered a sharp decline. I'd have thought, temporarily, less of Havana, of myself, and of the world. The passionate interest in living, the sense of æsthetic security, that resulted in my turning continually to the inconceivable slavery of writing, would have been absent. But seated in one of the most desirable spots in existence, a dining-room of copper-glazed tiles open on the tropics, about to begin a dinner with shrimps in the pink—the veritable rose—of perfection, while a head waiter, a triumph of intelligent sympathy, conferred with me on the delicate subject of wines, I was equal to prose of matchless loveliness.

The dinner, finally, as good dinners were apt to

be, was small, simple, with—the result of a prolonged consideration—a bottle of Marquis de Riscal. All the while the kaleidoscope of the Parque was revolving in patterns of bright yellows, silver, and indigo. Passers-by were extraordinarily vivid and near: a short man with a severe expression and a thick grey beard suddenly appeared in the open window and demanded that I buy a whole lottery ticket; a sallow individual from without unfolded a bright glazed sheaf of unspeakably stupid American magazines; farther off the crowd eddied through the lanes between the innumerable chairs drawn up companionably on the plaza. At a table close by a family of Cubans were supplementing the courses of formal dining with an endless vivacious chatter, a warmth of interest charming to follow.

The father, stout, with an impressive moustache of which not one hair seemed uncounted or mislaid, regarded his short, fat wife, his tall, slim son, and his two entrancing daughters with an impartial, active and affectionate attention. The girls were young, one perhaps fifteen and the other not more than a year or so older, though they both managed lorgnons with an ease and impertinent frankness that an older woman might well have envied; while they talked in rushes of vivid Spanish with an emphasis of delectable shrugged shoulders; and, recognizing an acquaintance, exhibited smiles as

dazzling as only youth knows. The boy, however, engaged me more strongly: a tone darker than the others, in repose his face, delicate in feature, was grave, reflective; his smooth black hair grew into a peak on his brow; his gaze was considerate, direct, and his mouth sensitive. Cuba, I thought, at its best; and here that was very good indeed. Any such degree of mingled dignity and the highly impressionable, of reserve and flexibility, was absent from the cruder young of the North.

He had, at the same time, an indefinable air of melancholy, a bearing that, while not devoid of pride, belonged to a minor people, to an island the ultimate fate of which—in a political world of singular faithlessness—was hidden in shadow. An affair of mere simple courage, of execution for an ideal by Spanish rifles in a Cabañas foss, he would have borne with brilliant success; he'd have ornamented charmingly the security of a great coffee estate in Pinar del Rio; it was possible that he might be distinguished in finance; but there was not back of him the sense of sheer weight, of ponderous land, that gave, for example, the chance young Englishman his conscious security, the American his slightly shrill material confidence.

This Cuban's particular quality, it seemed to me, belonged to the past, to an age when men wore jewelled buckles and aristocracy was an advantage rather than a misfortune. He had about him the

graceful fatality now so bitterly attacked by the widening power of what was heroically referred to as the people. He represented, from the crown of his lustrous hair to his narrow, correct dancing-shoes, in his shapely hands and dark, fine skin, privilege and sequestered gold. Outrages, I had heard, soon to be for ever overthrown! It was possible that both the charges and the threatened remedy were actualities, and that privilege would disappear . . . from one hand to another, and great lawns be cut up into cabbage patches and Empire ballrooms converted into communal halls for village rancour.

Not much, in the way of benefit, could follow that. And women in starched linen collars, with starched theories of civic consciousness, would hardly be an improvement on fragrant memories of satin, moments of passion and frailty, and the beauty of tenderness. A maze of clipped box, old emerald sod, represented a timeless striving for superiority, for, at least, the illusion of triumph over the littorals of slime; and their destruction in waves of hysteria, sentimentality, and envy was immeasurably disastrous. All of this I saw reflected in the boy with peaked hair at the next table. He took a cigarette from a black silk case, and I was immediately reminded of my cigar.

It had been chosen with immense care in the Inglaterra café for bonbons and souvenirs, liqueurs

and cigars. How remarkable it was, I had thought, hovering above the case which contained a bewildering choice of shapes and colours, to be in a land where all the cigars were, in the sense I knew, imported. I hesitated for a minute or more between a Larrinaga and a banquet Corona, and finally decided on the former. It was as long as the cigar called Fancy Tales, but slightly thicker and rolled to a point at either end; and the first breath of its smoke, drifting in a blue cloud away from the window, told me that until then I had known but little of tobacco. Coffee so black that it stained the white shell of its cup, a diminutive glass of Grand Marnier, the distilled last saturation of oranges and fin champagne, and the Larrinaga, the colour of oak-leaves freshly brown, combined in a transcending magic of contentment.

The point was—my special inhibition as a traveller—that I didn't want to move; I had no wish to speak to anyone or see what, particularly, I should have hurried away to view. That impatience I had served when I was twenty-one, in Naples, a city uniquely planned for morbid and natural curiosity. There the animated frescoes of Pompeii had been posed, at two lire a figure, before my assumption of mature experience. But now, past forty, I was without the ambition and desire to follow the cabs of the American business

men who, in the company of patient and fatigued Cubans, were, in the interest of vague appointments, bidding their families elaborate good-evenings.

Later it was inevitable that I should get to the theatres, hear whatever music offered, and see all the dancing, Spanish and Cuban, in the city of Havana, but not to-night. My present pleasure was not to be wasted in the bother of movement and a probable mistake. The cigar continued to veil me in its reflective smoke for another half-hour; there was more coffee in the pot. The tempered heat of the day lay over me like a spell, like an armour against the chill, the gaunt winds and rain, of the North. The scent of the sprig of orange blossoms was just perceptible, at once faint and laden with the potency of a magical grove.

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The weather, the temperature and special atmospheric envelopment of Havana, was, I was certain, different from any other, its heat modified by the winds that moved across the island at night, at least from this shore, and the days flooded with an incandescent sunlight like burning magnesium. Stirring slowly about my room before breakfast, the slatted shutters bowed against the already blazing day, a thread of cigarette smoke climbing hopelessly toward the

far ceiling, I thought of the idiotic popular conviction that the weather was a topic for stupid minds. The reverse, certainly, was true, since, inbound with all the settings of life, all nature, the weather offered an illimitable range of suggestion.

It had been the great discovery of imaginative prose—the novel for which we care most had been largely the result of that gained appreciation; and its absence in older books, placed in a vacuum, entirely accounted for their dry unreality. What, for instance, were the novels of Thomas Hardy but splendid records of the countryside weather ?—for nature and weather were one. This, more than any other force, conditioned men, stamping them out with an Ice Age, burning them black in Africa . . . setting royal palms by the doors of the Hôtel Inglaterra and willows along my lower lawn.

The difference between Havana and West Chester was exactly that difference in their foliage, in the low April green of one and the harsh, high fronds of the other. The quality, the weather, that made the trees made equally the men, just as it dictated their lives, the houses they lived in, their industries, and planted grains. This was not only true of the country but of the city, too, of George Moore as well as Hardy, for while Moore belonged principally to salons and the discreet interiors of broughams, a good half of the beauty of his pages was due to his response to the quality of spring

against a smoke-blackened London wall, the laburnum blossoming in his Dublin garden.

The slightest impression of Havana must be founded on a sensitive recognition of the crystal light and printed shadows which, in addition to its architecture of fact, added another of sweeping illusion. In the morning the plazas glittered in a complete revelation of every hard carving and leaf and painted kiosk, but later the detail merged in airy diagonal structures of shade. Modified, infrequently, by the gorgeous cumulus clouds drifting from the upward thrust, the anchorage, of the Andes, the entire process of the hours was upset. This was not simply a variation of inanimate surface, it had an exact counterpart in the emotions: bowed by an insuperable blaze or upright in the veiled sun the attitude of harmony was profoundly affected. The night was altogether separate; a time, I gathered, when it seldom rained; and there was never another city that took advantage of the night like Havana. Released from the resplendent tyranny of the sun, everyone, it appeared, disdaining sleep, lingered in the plazas, the cafés, and along the sea-walls, until dawn threatened. Here the dark was not alone a stage for nocturnal plans and figures, it was without a strangeness or fear for the Cubans thronging abroad, on foot and in motors, early and late. The whiteness of the buildings, too, even where they

were not illuminated, defined spaces never obscure, the city was never wholly lost, obliterated, by the imponderable blackness of the North. All this, every aspect of Havana's being, was the gift—the dangerous gift—of its situation, its weather. The blinding day, the city veiled in a sparkling night, like a vision in blanched satin with fireflies in her hair, were nothing more than meteorological.

For myself, my entire attitude was different in the room I now inhabited from the inherent feeling, in New York, of the Algonquin. I was, in white flannels and brown Holland, with roses against the mirror of the bureau, another man; not only my mentality but my physical bearing was changed. Here I was an individual who, moving about for an hour or so in the morning, spent the day until late afternoon in some quiet and cool inner spaciousness. That, I appreciated at once, was one of the comfortable peculiarities of Havana—it was always possible to be cool, in a café with the marble floor sprinkled with water, at the entrance of the Inglaterra, but where the chairs were the most uncomfortable in the world, or, better yet, with a book, a naranjada and pyjamas transiently at home.

For the iced refrescos of Cuba I had been prepared; and at breakfast, though that, I found later, was not its hour—I chose, rather than a naranjada, a pina colado—a glass nearly as large

and quite as thin as possible of the chilled essence of pineapple. A remarkable, a delightful, concoction. Later I heard the refrescos referred to contemptuously by Americans whose attitude toward the Cubans paralleled their opinion of the local drinks. They elected whisky, at times condescending to gin, and the effect was portentous. Some sat near me now, with breakfasts of bubbling ham and crisped eggs, lamenting the coffee.

It was doubtless part of the hypnotism of my liking for Havana that reconciled me to the coffee, poured simultaneously with hot salted milk into the cup. I accepted it at once, together with a cut French roll ingeniously buttered. Other efforts were made, through a window, to sell a wallpaper of lottery tickets, the vendor of magazines now put forward the *Havana Post*, printed in English, the curtains hung motionless, a transparent film on the bright space beyond.

There was nothing I had to do, or see; no duty to myself to fulfil; and, watching the stir of tourist departure, I was thankful for my total lack of uncomfortable incentive. I had, for instance, no intention of ascending the height of Morro Castle, which—I had hardly needed the assurance—included a fatiguing number of stairs, nor of becoming familiar with Cabañas fortress. It had been quite enough to see in passing that long pink wall and know that there were old batteries of

cannon embossed with the sovereign names of Spain. There were no picture galleries, and in Havana the churches were rich neither in tradition nor beauty, and the convents of early days had been turned into warehouses. It was, on the whole, a city without obtrusive history: even its first site was on the other side of the island; the wall, except for a fragment or two, had gone; its early aspects were practically absorbed by the later spirit that had captivated me. Here, if ever, was a place in which honesty of mood could be completely indulged.

A state not innocent of danger to the Puritan tradition—lately assaulted with useless vigour—of suppression; for the Latin acceptance of the whole of life had been added to the passions of the tropics. Cuba had cynically realized this, and multiplied a natural frankness with a specialized attention to the northern masculinity I had seen leaving the hotel at odd hours last night. I felt even so soon, with prohibition a reality, that our national prudery was a very unfortunate influence indeed in Havana. The season was at an end, only a few days of the racing remained, so I had missed the obvious worst; but traces of the corruption of the dull—the dull themselves in diminishing numbers—lingered.

As usual in foreign countries, and here with so many golden reasons to the contrary, Havana at

heart had no general liking for Americans. The few who had understood Cuba, either living there or journeying with discretion, were most warmly appreciated; and, characteristically, it was they more than the natives who were principally disconcerted by the released waggishness of Maine and Ohio and Illinois. But the majority were merely exploited. There was, certainly, something on the other side of the fence, for the Cubans were morbidly sensitive about their land, their monuments and martyrs, not necessarily impressive to the Anglo-Saxon heritage and temperament. There were fundamental racial differences with a preponderant ultimate weight in favour of continents as opposed to islands. The fascination Havana had for me wasn't inevitable; I was only considering with regret, æsthetic rather than moral, the effect on Cuba of any prostitution.

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As, in a temporary stoppage of its circular traffic, I walked across the Parque Central, its limits seemed to extend indefinitely, as if it had become a Sahara of pavement exposed to the white core of the sun; and I passed with a feeling of immense relief into the shade of a bookshop at the head of Obispo Street, where the intolerable glare slowly faded from my vision as I fingered the heaps of

volumes paper-bound in a variegated brightness of colour and design. In any bookshop I was entirely at home, contented; and here specially I was prepossessed with the idea of buying a great number of the novels solely for their covers—in short, making a collection of Spanish pictorial bindings. But the novels, I discovered, were, even in paper, almost a peso each; and since I was reluctant to invest two hundred or more dollars in a mere beginning the idea vanished. Their imaginative quality, however, the drawing and colour printing, were excellent, far better than ours; in fact we owned nothing at all like them.

They had a freedom of cruelty, a brutality of statement, of truth absent in American sentimentality: where women were without clothes they were naked, anatomically accounted for, as were the men; and the symbolical representations of labour and injustice were instinct with blood and anguish. A surprising number of stories by Blasco Ibáñez were evident; and it struck me that if I had read him in those casual bright copies, without the ponderous weight of his American volumes and uncritical reputation, I might have found a degree of enjoyment. There were a great many magazines, mostly Spanish, gaily covered, but with the stupidest contents imaginable—the bad reproductions of contemporary photographs on vile grey paper; although one, *La Esefa*, ad-

mirably reproduced, in vivid colour and titles, the Iberian spirit of the lighter Goya.

While I had been on narrow streets before I had never seen one with the dramatic quality of Obispo. Hands might almost have touched across its paved way, and the sidewalks, no more than amplified curbs, hardly allowed for the width of a skirt. It was cooled by shadow, except for a narrow brilliant strip, and the open shops were like caverns. The windows were particularly notable, for they held the wealth, the choice, of what was offered within: diamonds and panama hats, tortoise-shell, Canary Island embroidery and perfumery. There were cafés that specialized in minute cakes of chocolate and citron and almond paste set out in rows of surprisingly delicate workmanship, and shallow cafés whose shelves were banked with cordials and rons, gin, whiskies, and wine. There were bottles of eccentric shape holding divinely coloured liqueurs, squat bottles and pinched, files of amber sauternes, miniature glass baers from Russia filled with Kümmel, yellow and green chartreuse, syrupy green and white menthes, the Cinziano vermouth of Italy, Spanish cider, and orderly companies of mineral waters.

These stores had little zinc-topped bars, and there were always groups of men sipping and conversing in their tepid, intent manner. The street was crowded and, invariably allowing the women

the wall, it was necessary to step again and again from the sidewalk. They were mostly Americans; the Cuban women abroad were in glittering automobiles, already elaborate in lace and jewels and dipping hats, and drenched in powder. They were, occasionally, when young, extremely beautiful, with a dark haughtiness that I had always found irresistible.

In my early impressionable years it had continually been my fate to be entranced by lovely disagreeable girls with cloudy black hair and skin stained with brown rather than pink. Imperious girls with elevated chins and straight, sensitive noses! They had never, by any chance, paid the slightest attention to me; and the Cubans passing by with an air of supreme disdain called back my old interest and my old desire. I felt, for the moment, very young again and capable of romantic folly, of following a particular beauty to where her motor—a De Dion landaulet—disappeared into a courtyard with the closing of the great iron-bound doors.

A marked, not to say sensational, transformation of my own person had been a conspicuous part of that young imaginary business; for, while I was fat and clumsy, I managed to see myself tall and engaging, and dark, too; or, anyhow, a figure to beguile a charming girl. Something of that hopeless process had taken place in me once more,

now the vainer for the fact that even my youth had gone. The quality which called back a past illusion was very sensitive in Havana, and my feeling for the city was greatly enriched, further defined. It was charged with hazard, for what men like I had dreamed, leaving the actuality for the pretended, the pretended that so easily became the false, was, in Havana, real.

The Obispo under its striped awnings, with its merchandise of coral and high combs and pine-apple cloths, the women magnetic with a Spain that had slept with the East, the South, the bright blank walls, lemon-yellow, blue, rose, the palms borne against the sky on trunks like dulled pewter, the palpable sense of withdrawn dark mystery, all created an atmosphere of a too potent seductiveness. The street ended in the Plaza de Armas, with the ultramarine sea beyond; and seated, facing the arched, low, buff façade of the President's Palace, my brain was filled with vivid fragments of emotion.

What suddenly I realized about Havana, the particular triumph of its miraculous vitality, was that it had never, like so much of Italy, degenerated into a museum of the past, it was not in any aspect mortuary. Its relics of the conquistadores were swept over by the flood of to-day. Yet I began to be vaguely conscious of the history of Cuba, of that Cuba from which Cortez had set

sail, in the winter of 1519, for Mexico. Later this would, perhaps, become clearer to me; not pedantically, but because the spirit of that early time was still alive. I made no effort to direct my mind into deep channels. What must come must come; and if it were a gin rickey rather than the slavery of the repartimento system I'd be little enough disturbed.

The gin rickey proved to be an immediate reality, in the patio of the Inglaterra—a stream of silver bubbles shot into a glass where an emerald lime floated vivaciously. I had no intention of going out again until the shadows of late afternoon had lengthened far toward the white front of the Gomez-Mena building across the plaza; and after lunch I went up to the quiet of my room. I should certainly write no letters, read—idly—none of the few books published about Cuba, and which were on my table, and I began the essays of James Huneker called "Bedouins." His rhapsodies over Mary Garden, as colourful in style as the glass above the window, I soon dropped and picked indifferently among the novels that remained. A poor lot—the thin current stream of American fiction, doubly pale in Havana.

The day wheeled from south to west. I was perfectly contented to linger doing nothing, scarcely thinking, in the subdued and darkened heat. There was a heavy passage of trunks

through the echoing hall without; the melancholy calling of the evening papers rose on the air; I was enveloped in the isolation of a strange tongue. To sit as still as possible, as receptive as possible, to stroll aimlessly, watch indiscriminately, was the secret of conduct in my situation. Nothing could be planned or provided for. The thing was to get enjoyment from what I did and saw; what benefit I'd receive, I knew from long experience, would be largely subconscious. I had been in Havana scarcely more than a day, and already I had collected a hundred impressions and measureless pleasure. How wise I had been to come . . . extravagantly, with—as it were—a flower in my coat, a gesture of protest, of indifference, to all that the world now emphasized.

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However, the tranquillity of the afternoon was sharply interrupted by my going, unexpectedly, to the races at Oriental Park. I had to dress with the utmost rapidity, leaving the choice of a tie to chance, for the dun car of the United States Military Attaché was waiting for me. The attaché, handsomely bearing the brown seal of Philippine campaigns, abstracted in manner, sat forward with an imperturbable military chauffeur, while the back of the car was flooded by the affable speech

of a Castilian Marquis whose variety of experience in the realms of expert and dangerous games had only been limited to their known forms. It was unquestionably the mixture of my commonplace Presbyterian blood and incurable habit of romance that gave me a distinct satisfaction in my surroundings. I was glad that the Marquis was what he was and that he held a trans-continental motor record; it pleased my honest democratic instincts when other cars were held back for our progress; and, finally, the deep chairs on the veranda of the Jockey Club were precisely right for a lounging afternoon in an expensive sporting atmosphere.

The race track seemed to me long—was it a mile?—and, with the horses at a starting-post across from the grand stand, I couldn't tell one from another. The grand stand was on the right, and beyond the park were low monotonous lines of stables. It had been raining, the track was heavy, and the race that followed the blowing of a bugle covered the silk of the jockeys with mud. My pleasure, as always, slowly subsided at the persistent intrusion of an inner destructive questioning. Incontestably the racing, the horses lining fretfully and scrambling through the muddy pools, left me cold. The sweep of the Jockey Club, too, was comparatively empty of interest; the spectators there—they were more or less intent upon the results posted on the board opposite—

were not the immemorial onlookers at such affairs of sweepstakes, selling plates and furloughs.

The Cuban women present, elaborately dressed for shaded lawns and *salons de thé*, were largely foreign to the wide-spread open spectacle. I remembered photographs of English races where groups of dukes with ruddy features, in rough tweeds, sat through drizzling afternoons on their iron-shod stick seats, and women of title, in waterproofs and harsh brogues, tramped through the sloshing turf . . . an attitude far removed from Havana. A group of royal palms lifted in the middle distance alone gave the races an exotic air; though they were, of course, promoted and ridden by Americans, and their mechanics were quite that which operated in New Orleans and Butte and Baltimore. Now I was annoyed because I had, thoughtlessly, come; I might as well have gone to the baseball game in what had formerly been the bull ring.

Yet I could retire to my speculations for escape, and I thought how peculiarly modern outdoor games, sport, belonged to the British, to them and their relatives beyond the sea. I remembered, in this connection, the story of a French vicomte I knew, a man of imposing build, who, in yellow gloves, shot field larks attracted by the flashing of a mirror manipulated by his valet. *Le sport!* But the Spaniards, bred to the delicate agility of

bull-fighting, trained in endurance on the inconceivably fast pelota courts, were more athletic than the French; though, as a race, they were inclined to delegate their games to professionals. The sporting amateur, in spite of the Marquis, was a rarity; rather they chose to be lookers-on at brilliant spectacles which retained an appreciable amount of a mediæval cruelty diversified from our own brutal strain.

This, naturally, had been influenced, strengthened, in Cuba by the climate, the breath of the tropics; even the winters were not conducive to violent exercise, aside from the fact that that was the prerogative of stolid temperaments. It was the deliberate, the unexcitable, who most excelled at trials of personal muscular skill, neither of which qualities were at home below certain latitudes. For myself, I was grateful, for I hadn't much in common with the exemplifications of field skill I had met. They were very apt to pay for their success by the absence of the attributes I particularly admired, often they were snobs of a very exasperating type—monuments of college beef with irreproachable hair, sacrosanct pins, and insensate conventional mentality.

A race at an end, the jockeys, carrying their saddles, trooped to the judge's stand to be weighed, and I was shocked by their wizened, preternaturally cunning faces. They were like pygmies of a strange

breed in red and yellow and blue satins; faultless for their purpose, on the ground they were extraordinary, leather-skinned with puckering eyes, drawn mouths, and distorted bodies. They wrangled among themselves in shrill or foggy voices—a very depressing specialization of humanity. But the horses were magnificent, slender and shining. I admired them from a distance, glad that it was no part of my responsibility to ride. Long ago, under the pressure of an untender emotion, I had learned to sit on a horse through his reasonable moments; but I had never become at ease; and I stopped riding when, on the country road of a May Sunday noon, a tall sorrel ran away with me so fast and so far that we passed three churches with their scattering congregations.

There were, on the veranda, drinks, and even they — the Scotch highballs — translated into Spanish, had an unfamiliar and borrowed sound. It was on my return, stopping at the Telegrafo Café, that I learned the delightful possibility of a Daiquiri cocktail. It was twice as large as ordinary, what in the North was called a double, but no Daiquiri out of Cuba could be thought of in comparison. Only one other drink might be considered—a Ramos gin-fiz. My extreme allegiance had been given to the latter. I was not willing, even in the Telegrafo, to depose it from

first place; but the Telegrafo was a pleasanter spot than the New Orleans Stag bar. I could see the beginning of the Prado, with the swirl of cars on their afternoon round to the Malecón. Some arc-lights, just turned on, were sources of colour, like great symmetrical lemons, rather than illumination; after another rain the bare flambeau-trees would burst into fiery bloom.

I was alone, and, sauntering back to the Inglaterra, through the gallery that had once been the Paseo Isabel, I came on my flower man, who advanced with a smile and a close nosegay of gardenias. A curious flower, I thought, getting water for them in a glass. They didn't wilt, as was usual, but turned brown and faded in the manner of a lovely pallid woman, a simile I had used in "Linda Condon." A flower that belonged less to nature than to drawing-rooms, to rococo salons and the opera loges of 1840, and not at all to the present in the United States. But worn low on the neck, it was entirely appropriate to the black hair of the Cuban woman. Gold hair, the fair temperament, had no business with gardenias; bouquets of white sweet peas looped with pale green and silver ribbon, yes; and dark bunches of moss roses; the old bouquets of concentric rings of buds in lace paper! They were the property of the girls I had known, the frank girls with clear grey eyes, and the appealing girls with eyes like

forget-me-nots. Something more poignant, a heavier disturbing perfume, was necessary against a figure seen only from a balcony or with a vague fleetness behind a grille gracefully wrought out of iron.

My shutters now were opened, and I could make out, against the dimming sky, the languid folds of the Spanish flag above the entrance of the Centro Gallego—the standard that had conquered the western tropics, only, in turn, to be subdued by a freedom of the wind mightier than His Most Catholic Majesty.

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There was some question of where I'd go for dinner, for in Havana there were many cafés to explore—the Dos Hermanos, the Paris, the Florida, the Hôtel de Luz, the Miramar; but, finally, I walked down to the Prado, to the sea and the Miramar, a little because of its situation, directly on the Malecón, but principally for the reason that it had one of the most beautiful names possible, a name which called up the image of a level tide so smooth that it held in shining replica the forts, the ships, and the clouds. Tables were prepared for dinner in the café, while those on the terrace were without cloths, but there I determined to sit, and the waiter whose attention I captured, after a long delay, agreed.

A solitary couple had their heads together by a window, and they, with myself, were the only diners. It was, evidently, not now the place to go at this hour. Beyond the dining-room, a patio or, rather, an open court, was set for dancing, melancholy as such spaces can be; deserted and half-lighted; but I saw that a considerable activity was expected much later.

I was glad that the terrace was empty, for, with the light now faded from the sea, and its blueness merging into black, the remote tranquillity of evening was happier without a sharp chatter of voices. The Miramar, considering its place—the most advantageous in all Havana—and fame was surprisingly small, scarcely more than two stories high, the sombre, maroon walls, with their long windows, hardly filled an angle of the Malecón. The dinner was slow in arriving: the silver made its appearance, a goblet was brought separately, a plate of French bread was later followed by its butter. The minute native oysters were no more than shreds adhering to their shells, but they had a notable flavour, a crawfish at its brightest apogee, and an omelet was browned in a delicate perfection of powdered sugar.

I deserted Spanish wine, the admirable Riscal, for champagne; for there was about an air of departed charm, the whisper of old waltzes and tarleton, that demanded commemoration. The

Miramar had been the gay centre of that mid-century life which had folded Havana in the lasting influence of its memories. A gaiety not even at a disadvantage compared to the feverish society of to-day! The bodices then had been no more than scraps of chambery gauze and Chinese ribbon below shoulders to the whiteness of which the entire feminine age had been devoted. The flounced bell-skirts had swung airily on gracious silk clappers.

The automobiles on the Malecón multiplied, for the night was hot; soon there was a solid double opposed procession on the broad, sweeping drive. This was a triumph of American engineering and, I had no doubt, an improvement on the informality of rocks and débris that had existed before. Yet I'd like to have seen it when the promenade had not yet been laid down with mechanical precision in, perhaps, the early seventies. Then there were sea baths cut in the live rock at the end of the Paseo Isabel, at the Campos Eliseos, where the water was like a cooler liquid green air, and where, after storms, a foaming surf poured over the barriers. There were no motors then, but volantes and the modern quintrins, with two horses, one outside the shafts, and a riding calesero in vermilion and gold lace, and latest of all, as new as possible, the victorias.

Neither, then, was the Prado paved, but the

trees were infinitely finer—five rows there were in 'fifty-seven—when the clamour of the city was, in great part, peals of bells. This was a familiar process with me, to leave the present for the past in a mood of irrational regret. But never for the heroic, the real past; the years I chose to imagine lay hardly behind the horizon; in Italy it had been the Risorgimento, at farthest the *villeggiatura* of Antonio Longo, or the *viole d'amore* of Cimarosa in churches. And now, drinking my champagne on the empty flagged terrace of the Miramar, facing, across the parade of automobiles, the blank curtain of the night, starred on the right by the lights of castellated forts, my mind vibrated with grace notes no longer heard outside the faint distilled sweetness of music-boxes.

As if in derision of this a loud, unexpected music rose from the bandstand in the Plaza, and I saw that a flood of people, seated or moving along the pavements and through the lanes of chairs, had gathered. Nothing, I thought, could have delighted me more; but my anticipation was soon smothered by the absurdity of the selections: they were not from Balfé nor Rossini, neither military nor the accented rhythm of Spain . . . the opening number was Parsifal, blown into the profound night with a convention of brassy emphasis.

At the total destruction of my pleasure I cursed

the pretentious stupidity of the bandmaster and a great deal else of modern Cuba. I remembered particularly some regrets, locally expressed, that the Spanish domination was no more. Things, it was said, were better ordered then. But this was a position the vainness of which I couldn't join: it was no part of my disposition to combat, or even regret, the inevitable. My course—quite other—was to project myself into periods whose very loss formed most of their charm. Gone, they took on the tender memories of the dead, and were invested with the dignity, the beauty, of a warm fragility.

Two girls were now seated at a table by the entrance, and, while they were alone for the moment, it was evident that they had no intention of remaining in that unprofitable state longer than necessary. Their fleet appraising glances rested on me and the silver bucket by my chair, and one permitted the shadow of a discreet smile to appear on her carmined lips. She was pretty, lightly dressed in a flowery summer stuff, but she was as gold in colouring as corn silk; an anachronism in Havana I seriously deplored. The other was dark, but she was, at the same time, disagreeable; something had annoyed her excessively, and I made no move. Such company was occasionally entertaining, in a superficial, conversational sense; but, I was obliged to add, not often.

I went over all the informal girls I could recall

who had been worth the effort to cultivate them, either charming or wise or sensitive, and my bag, unlike Chopin's or George Moore's own report, was discouragingly slim. They had been, but perhaps of necessity, materialists, valuers only of the expensively concrete; yes, the majority of such adventures had been sordid. It was due, without question, to certain deterrent qualities in my own personality; but even more, I was convinced, to the fact that, in America, girls, or at least those of my youth, regarded emotion as portentously synonymous with ruin. Emotion, for nice girls, was deprecated; their sense of modesty, of shame, was magnified at the expense of everything else. This, together with the tragic difference of the age of marriage in nature and in society, had condemned the United States to very low levels of feeling.

Unfortunately I had been born into the most rigid of all societies—a prosperous and Presbyterian middle-class; an influence that succeeded in making religion hideous before I was fifteen, planting in me, too, the belief that man was, in his instinctive life, filthy. I outgrew the latter, but never the first; and now, looking back, I could recognize how that lauded creed had nearly damned me to a hell far surpassing in dreadfulness anything of its own bitter imagining. The cold metaphysical fog had saturated us all alike. . . . How dreary my early

experience was! . . . What detestable travesties of passion! A carful of young men soon stopped at the curb of the Miramar, and the two girls, dark and gold, were immediately invested with the politest attentions. There was a chorus of laughter and protests and suggestions, in which a privileged waiter joined, when they vociferously left to dance at Carmelo.

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Walking generally in the direction of my room, I left the Prado for an especially dramatic—no, melodramatic—street, where the bare walls and iron-bolted doors were made startling by the white glare of electric lights. Fixed to the walls, infrequently, were the wrought-iron brackets of the earlier lanterns, converted, it might be, for the period before the present, into gas jets. In that watery illumination such streets must have seemed less amazing than now; and entirely natural with only the oil lanterns lifting a small surface of masonry or an isolated angle out of the night. Indeed, whole districts were dark, except for a rare lamp privately maintained as an obligation of grace. That darkness, like the streets, was mediæval; they belonged one to the other—ways through which it was congruous to carry a flare and sword, practical measures both.

These precautions had been long discarded, but

the passages themselves were unchanged, not a stone had shifted; they were, particularly at night, the Middle Ages. And it was as though a sudden blaze had been created by unholy magic, a sparkling radiance of hell, throwing into intolerable clearness the decent reticence of the time. The arc-lights gave the streets an absolute air of unreality and tragic strangeness. Moving in them I had the feeling of blundering awake into a dream, of being irretrievably lost in an illusion of potential horror. An open door with its glimpse into an inner room only increased the oppression: it, too, was brilliant with electricity, a room of unrelieved icy pallor, except for a warmer blur under an Agony on the Cross, where a small company of men and women sat in a rigid, blanched formality that might have been death.

It was quite natural, a commonplace of Havana; but rather than a picture of familiar life, it resembled the *memento mori* of a grotto. My thoughts turned to the symbols and representations of the Catholic Church—a business of blood and torment and flame, of Sebastian torn with arrows and a canonized girl, whose name I forgot, carrying her eyeballs in a hand. Curiously enough the spirit which had given birth to this suffering had been popularly lost, together with any conception of the ages in which it occurred; and all that remained was a pathological horror. Italy and

Spain were saturated with it: Italy in the revolting wax spectacles of Easter, and Spain with the veritable crucifixions of to-day.

It was, I supposed, to a certain extent unavoidable in an establishment whose hold on the ponderable present depended on threats and promises laid in the future. But it seemed to me unfortunate, to say the least, that a Church whose business was life should be so concerned with smoky death. Threats and promises! The early history of Cuba, I remembered, was inbound with the administrative and protective powers of the Church—in 1516 the native Cubeños were put in charge of the Order of Jeronimites, localized in La Espanola—Santo Domingo. The double motive of the Spanish Christian kings in the Western hemisphere had been conversion and gold, but which of these was uppermost it was impossible to determine. However, when the gold, the temporal interest, decreased in one locality, the spiritual concern of Seville shifted to the more productive regions.

That was a period, a conquest, when a violent death was a greater blessing than living in a state of damnable heresy; and so, between the saving of their souls and the loss of their bodies in the king's mines, the natives were thoroughly cared for. It must be said, though, that de las Casas, a priest whose spirit was above any intimidation or venality, denounced the outrages against the Cuban Indians

to the shining heavens, the cerulean sea, the Audencia, and the Throne. But his humanitarianism was ineffectual against a system founded on the belief that a god had given the earth and its recalcitrant people for the profit and glory, the servants, of a single religious dogma.

It was, possibly, the aspect of my mind that impressions, emotions, held such a great suggestibility. Returning toward the Inglaterra I had no intention of losing myself in the mazes of applied theology; and I speedily dropped such a sombre topic from my thoughts. Turning back to the Prado I found the walks filled with men, progressing slowly or seated on the flat marble benches along the sides. Whenever a woman did pass on foot their interest and speculations were endless: heads turned in rows, sage remarks were exchanged, and tentative simpaticas murmured. Her mother—if she had the slightest pretensions to youth or good looks—was fervently blessed for so fetching a daughter. Here, of course, was the defect of the local attitude toward women—it put the emphasis perpetually on a gallantry affecting the men more even than the women. There was a constant danger of becoming one-sided.

The Telegrafo and the Louvre were crowded, with more refrescos and ices on the table than authoritative drinks; the cigarettes of the discoursive throngs in the Parque Central were like

a sheet of fireflies, and the Marti and Pairet theatres were spreading abroad the audiences of their second evening shows. The patio of the Inglaterra was well filled and I stopped there; not, however, for a naranjada. Some late suppers were still occupying the dining-room, and a drunken American was gravely addressing a table and meeting with a mechanical politeness that I admired for its sustained patience. He left, finally, and wandered unsteadily, a subject of entertainment for his fellows and a mark of contempt to the Cubans present. Beyond me were some beautifully dressed English—two men in the final perfection of easy masculine garb and a girl flushed with beauty in pearls. On the other hand a young Frenchman, decorated with the most honourable of war ribbons, and two women, all in mourning, were conversing in the difficult Parisian idiom.

I should like to have been at either table—their attractions were equal; but, forced to remain alone, I thought of how rude the English would have been had I moved over to them. The English would have been boorish, while the French would have met me with an impenetrable polite reserve. Both would regard me as an idiot or an agent; to have spoken to them would have been an affront. And yet I was confident that we'd have got on very well; I was not without a name in London,

and the French were delightfully sensitive to any practising of the arts. The English, I gathered from their unguarded talk, were cruising on a yacht now lying in Havana harbour; and I saw myself, the following morning, going off to them in a smart tender and sitting under the white awning spread aft, with a whisky-and-soda, talking or not, but happily aware of the shining brass and mahogany fittings, the immaculate paint and gay pennants.

I'd always liked worldly pomp and settings, marble Georgian houses with the long windows open directly on closed greens with statues of lead; and to linger, before going down to dinner, on a minstrel's gallery above a stone hall and gathered company; I'd rather be on a yacht than on an excursion boat; yet I infinitely preferred reading about the latter. For some hidden, or half-perceived, reason yachts were not impressive in creative prose; there the concerns and pleasures of aristocracy frequently appeared tawdry and unimportant. Even its heroism, in the valour of battle and imperturbable sacrifice, was less moving to me than simpler affairs. Yet there was no doubt but that I was personally inclined to the extremes of luxury; and this apparent contradiction brought to my life, my writing, the problem of a devotion to words as disarmingly simple as the leaves of spring—as simple and as lovely in clear

colour—about the common experience of life and death, together with an absorbing attention for Manchu women and exotic children and emeralds.

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The following day, hot and still, with the exception of capricious movements of air in paved shaded places, was overcast, the brilliancy of Havana, of the white and green plazas, subdued. And this softening of sharp lines and blazing façades seemed to influence, too, the noises, the calls, of the streets, so that it was all apparently unsubstantial, like the ultimate romantic mirage of a city. I wandered along Neptuno Street to Belascoin, and then to the Parque Maceo, where I ignored the massed bronze and granite of its statue for the slightly undulating shimmering tide. In the distance the sea was lost in the sky—a nebulous grey expanse such as might have existed before the beginning of comparative solidity. I lost all sense of time, the centuries were jumbled together like mangoes in a basket. Yes, they were no greater, no more important or stable, than tropical fruit.

The vivid spectacle of Cuba, for example, contracted to a palm's breadth, the island became nothing more than the glimmer of a torch in illimitable dusk. It had been discovered by Columbus, a presumptuous term used arrogantly in

the sense of created—an Arcadian shore where, because food grew without cultivation, without effort, and the gold was soft for beating into bracelets, the natives lived easily and ornamentally and in peace. They wore, rather than steel and the harsh shirts of the Inquisition, the feathers of birds with woven, dyed quills and fragrant grasses. They sang, they danced with a notable grace, loved and died in the simplicity of bohios of palm board and thatch under nine Caciques.

Then, in the drawing of a breath, they were all destroyed, gone, killed by slavery, in the name of God, on the points of swords, by the rapacity, the corruption, the diseases, of civilization. A Spanish Cuba rose—Iberian and yet singularly different—a business of Captain-General and Teniente Rey, of alcalde and alcaide, of Santiago de Cuba, and San Cristóbal de la Habana. The French under Jacques Sores, and the English under Drake, sailed over the horizon. In less than a second, the expiration of a sigh, Diego de Velasquez and Narvaez, Isabel de Bobadilla, Rojas and Guzman, the merchant Diego Perez in vain laying the guns of the *Magdalena* in defence of the past—had gone. The Cedula from Madrid, in eighteen hundred and twenty-five, began the conspiracies; Tacón came and went, the fiscals beat free coloured men to death and entertained the negro women naked at balls. The Lopez rebellion was followed

by the ten years' war of eighteen hundred and sixty-eight and the peace of Zanjon, the great rebellion and Weyler.

There remained now the indefinite sea and a city withdrawn, secretive, made vaguely beautiful by intangible voices, all its voices that had laughed and shouted, whispered and cried; and by the towers and walls merged in a single pattern, the old and the new drawn together by an aspect of impermanence, freed from the deceptive appearance of solidity. Suddenly its history had been shown to me in a flash of emotion, a mood of feeling. I hadn't come to Cuba ignorant of the land, but I had determined to slight what was but written inanimate fact. I had no disposition for instruction: books were powerless to create La Punta for me, it must bear its own credentials . . . it might become, to my uncertain advantage, as important as a Daiquiri cocktail, as a Larriñaga cigar, but hardly more.

In any other case I'd have cheated myself, not only of pleasure, the relaxation possible to honesty of mind, but of any hope of future material. The creative habit was the most tireless and frugal in existence: there was nothing—no experience, person, disillusionment, or pain—not endlessly sounded for its every note and meaning. No one could predict what would be indispensable, just as it was impossible to foresee, in the projection of a novel,

where its fine moments occurred. And, returning to the descriptive and historical books on Cuba, left so largely unread at the Inglaterra, it was probable that they had omitted, in their effort for literal and conventional emphasis, what might in their subject be vivifying to me.

This, however, was beyond spoiling—a history so picturesque, as I have intimated, that its very vividness, its commonest phases, had become the threadbare material of obvious romance; but, outside of all that, the other Havana, the mid-Victorian Pompeii, a city that none could have predicted or told me of, offered the incentive of its particular and rare charm. Seated in the Parque Maceo, on the sea-wall, my imagination stirred with the first beginnings of a story; it would take place in the period when the avaricious grip of Spain was loosening, a story of secret patriotism and the idealism of youth, set in marble salons, at the opera and the cafés. It would not concern itself with any love except the fidelity between two men, a story of friendship.

There it would be different from The Arrow of Gold and Doña Rita; no peignoirs, thank you, but a formality, a passionate propriety, in keeping with the social gravity and impersonal devotion of the very young. There must be crinoline—would I never escape from that ?—and candelabra with glittering prisms; Spanish soldiers

in striped linen and officials with green tasselled canes. My youth, he'd come from the United States, would have his little dinners at the Restaurant Française, in Cuba Street number seventy-two and his refrescos at the Café Dominica. In the end he'd leave Havana, having accomplished nothing but the loss of his illusions for the gain of a memory like a dream, but his friend, a Cuban—I had seen him that first night at dinner in the Inglaterra—would be killed. How——

It was time to go back to the hotel, and the story receded. I walked too far on Belascoin Street, all the way to Salud; and, past the Tacón Market, came out on the Parque de Colon, where now there was a hot, dusty wind, like a localized sirocco, and I was glad to reach my room. The reflection of the coloured glass above the window was hardly discernible on the tiles; the interior was permeated by a shadow which made the ceiling appear high beyond computation; and my wardrobe trunk, standing open, exhibited a rack of limp neckties. I turned again to the novels on the table and again let them drop, unattended, from a listless hand. Tepid water! And I wondered—a constant subject with me—when we'd have a new vigorous American literature, a literature absolutely native, by men who had not, like myself, been to school to Turgenev and the English lyrical poetry. Henry James had found the United States lacking in background; the lack

was evident, but not in the country of his birth.

This was not a complaint against The Velvet Glove except as it equally applied to me; but an intense desire for a fresh talent, an ability to which we could, without reserve, take off our hats. The fact hit me that I was forty, although it was still the fashion among reviewers to speak of me as a promising young man, and that there were patches of grey hair on my temples. Yet I had been, everything considered, remarkably successful; there was no need for sentimental regrets, a trait of mental feebleness.

I decided to do something positive that evening, to go to the theatre, or, if it were playing, to see the Jai Alai. The latter was possible, and, by way of the Telegrafo, I reached the Hôtel Florida for dinner, a restaurant which, because of the windows looking down on it, had the pleasant individual air of a courtyard. The music played, diners came and went, and I gazed up at the shallow balconies in the hopefulness of an incorrigible imagination. The Fronton Jai Alai—in Havana the game, pelota, had taken the title of its court—was a long way from Obispo Street, but I knew when we had reached it by the solid volume of shouting that escaped from the high concrete building into the dim neighbourhood.

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Inside, the court was an immense expanse with granite-laid walls, a long rectangle, one side of which was formed by the steeply banked rows of spectators. Regular spaces were marked by white lines on the playing floor, and at one end the score was hung against the names of the players, now two teams—the Azules and the Blancos. The boxes were above the cement ledges packed with standing men, by a promenade, where the betting was conducted, cigars sold, and a small, active bar maintained. It was the night of a galà benefit, for the Damas de Caridad, and I had been fortunate in getting a single box seat. I was late, though, and the game progressing, still I was the first in our railed space; but the others, who proved to be Americans, soon followed—three prosperous men, manufacturers I thought, with wives in whom native good taste had been given the opportunities of large resources.

One of the women—who, in the arrangement of the box, sat beside me—smiled with a magnetism that had easily survived the loss of her youth; she was rather silent than not, but the rest swept into a conversation in their best public manner. A man accompanying them, it developed, knew Cuba and Jai Alai, and he secured for the amusement of the others a cesta, the basket-like racquet worn strapped to the arm. It was from him I discovered that the court was two hundred and ten

feet long and thirty-six feet wide, while the service consisted in dropping the ball and, on its rebound, catching it in the cesta and throwing it against the far end wall. From there, with a sharp smack audible all over the Fronton, the ball shot back, if not a fault, within a marked area, and one of the opposing side caught it, in the air or on the first bounce, and returned it against the end wall. At first I could see nothing but the violent activity of the players frozen into statuesque attitudes of throwing, vigorous figures in, mostly, white, with soft red silk sashes. I heard the ball hit, and saw it rolling out of play; and then, with some slight realization of the rapidity of its flight, I was able to follow the course from cesta to wall and floor.

There had never been, I was certain, another game where instantaneous judgment, skill, and endurance had been carried to such a far point. There was seldom a fault or error; the ball, flying like a bullet, was caught and flung with a single gesture; again and again it carried from one end wall to the other, from which it was hurled on. Angles of flight were calculated and controlled, the long side wall was utilized. . . . Then a player, of the Azules, was hit in the ankle, and the abruptness with which he went down showed me a possibility I had ignored.

During this the clamour of the audience was indescribable, made up, for the most part, of the

difficulties of constantly shifting odds and betting. The odds changed practically with every passage of the ball—opening at, say, five to three against the favourites, as they drew steadily ahead in a game of twenty-five points it jumped to eight to four, ten to three, anything that could be placed. On the floor a small company of bookmakers, distinguished by their scarlet caps, shouted in every direction, and betting paper was thrown adroitly through the air in hollow rubber balls. Those who had backed the team now far ahead at favourable odds were yelling jubilantly, and others were trying, at the expense of their lungs, to cover by hedging their probable losses.

There was, however, toward what should have been the end, an unlooked-for development—the team apparently hopelessly behind crept up. An astounded pause followed, and then an uproar rose that cast the former sound into insignificance. Soon the score was practically tied: there were shrill entreaties, basso curses, a storm of indiscriminate insults. Now the backers of the lesser couple scrambled vocally to take advantage of the betting opportunities for ever lost—the odds were even, then depressed on the other side. When the game was over the noise died instantly: men black with passion, shaking with rage, crushing their hats, or with lifted clenched fists, at once conversed with smiling affability. My eyes had

been badly strained, and I was glad to leave the box and stroll along the promenade. The betting counters were jammed by the owners of winning tickets, the men behind the bar were, in their own way, as active as the pelota players.

The majority of the boxes were occupied by Cuban families, but yet there was an appreciable number of foreigners. A slender girl, in a low dinner dress, was sitting on the railing of her box, swinging a graceful slipper and smoking a cigarette —New York was indelibly stamped on her—and, among the masculine world of Spanish antecedents, she created a frank centre of interest. For her part, she studied the crowd quite blocking the way below her with a cold indifference, the personification of young assured arrogance.

A quiniela followed, with six contestants, one against the other in successive pairs; but my eyes were now definitely exhausted by the necessary straining gaze; and my interest fastened on the woman beside me. She was at once intimately attached to the people with her and abstracted in bearing: a woman not far from fifty, but graceful still and, in a flexible black silk crêpe with a broad girdle of jet, still desirable. It seemed to me that, in spite of an admirable manner, she was a little impatient at the volubility around her; or it might be, in contradiction to this, she was exercising a patience based on fortitude. It was clear that

she hadn't a great deal in common with the man who had evidently been married to her for a considerable length of years. They spoke little—it was he who had fetched the cesta—each immersed in their own thoughts. A woman, I decided, finely sensitive, superior, who, as she had grown older, had found no demand for the qualities which she knew to be her best.

A painful situation, a shocking waste; and from which, for her, there was no escape, for she had patently what was known as character. She at once was conscious of the absolute need for spiritual freedom and bound by commitments paramount to her self-esteem. But even if she had been more daring, less conscientious, what could she have gained ? what was there for her in a society condemned to express the spirit in the terms of flesh ? She had too much charm, too great a vitality, to be absorbed in the superficial affairs of women, the substitute life of charity. And once married, probably to a man the model of kindly faith, she was caught in a desert of sterile monotony. Even children, I could see, if they existed, had not slain her questioning attractive personality.

She smiled at me again, later, her narrow, slightly wasting hands clasped about a knee—a smile of sympathetic comprehension and unquenchable woman. She would have been happier chattering in the obvious strain of stupidity

behind her: any special beauty was always paid for in the imposed loneliness of a spoken or unspoken surrounding resentment. To be content with a facile compliment, the majority of tricks at auction bridge, mechanical pleasures, was the measure of wisdom for women in her situation. The last quiniela over, plainly weary, she gathered a cloak about her shoulders and left the box, without, as I had hoped, some last gesture or even a word: and I pictured her sitting listlessly, distraught, in the café to which they were proceeding.

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The pelota immediately vanished from my mind before the infinitely more fundamental and interesting problem of marriage; and—remembering the ominous sign of a woman's club on the Malecón—I wondered if the Cuban women were contented with the tradition as it had been handed down to them. In the life that I knew in the North, an infinitesimal grain of sand irritating in the body of the United States, the sacredness of matrimony had waned very seriously; it would, of course, go on, probably for ever, since no other arrangement could be thought of conciliating the necessities of both dreams and property; but, subjected to the scrutiny of intelligence rather than sentimentality, it seemed both impotent and foolish. The impotence certainly, for where my grandfather had

thirteen children and my mother four—or was it five?—I had none. There had always been individuals unrestrained by the complicated oaths of the wedding service—a strictly legal proceeding to which the Church had been permitted to add its furbelows—dissatisfied ladies, and gentlemen of the commercial road. I wasn't referring to them, but to the expression, at once puzzled, humorous, and impatient, that lately I had seen wives of probity turn on their husbands.

They expressed the conviction that the purely masculine aphorism to the effect that home was the place for women meant nothing more than a clearing of the decks for unrestricted action. This was beautifully expressed, confirmed, in Havana, where decks were without a single impediment; and I speculated about the attitude of the Cuban women in houses barred with both actual and metaphorical iron. Tradition weighed heavily on their outlook, but there was that club on the Malecón, tradition had bound the farm wives of Pennsylvania, yet they were progressively rebelling against the insanity of endless labour and isolation. But, perversely, the married groups I saw in Havana were remarkably close, simple, and happy. They sat in rows at the concerts on the plazas, went off on small excursions, in entire harmony—a thing impossible to the born American, with whom such parties began in exasperation and ended in

nervous exhaustion. An American husband, of the class largely evident in Havana, escorted his family abroad with truculence and an air of shame at being exposed in such a ridiculous situation. If there was more than one household implicated the men invariably drew away together: there was a predominance of cursing and the wails of irritably smacked children. The truth was that the citizens of the United States, in their feverish passage through life, had decidedly a poor time—either restlessness or ambition or dissatisfaction destroyed their peace of mind. Labour, more highly paid than at any other place or time, got less satisfaction for its money than a Cuban mestizo with a peseta.

My thoughts returned abruptly to the point where they had started, to marriage, and I hoped that Cuba wouldn't be disorganized by the present ferment, that the feminine element, discovering their wrongs, wouldn't leave their balconies and patios for the dusty publicity of the street. Already a decline had been suffered, first in the loss of mantillas and combs, next in the passing of single-horse victorias for unrestrained tin locomotives, and then in the hideous flood of electric lighting. Still a great deal of the charm, the empire, of Havana women remained; while nothing but utter disaster approached them from the North.

This was no new position for me, and it had never failed to be attacked, usually with the insinuation that, spiritually, I was part of Turkey-in-Asia . . . a place of gardens where it was not inconceivable that I'd be happy: certainly the politics there were no worse than those to which I had been inured from birth, with murder on the streets at noon distinguished by a white ribbon in its buttonhole. The Armenians were no more precariously situated than the Albigenses under Innocent III. I had heard, as well, that the Governments of Cuba had not been free from suspicion, but it was hoped that elections supervised from the United States would institute reform. Rare irony! Elections, I should have said, going back once more to the beginning, opening to emancipated women.

Gathering, in imagination, all the feminine world of Havana into a fragrant assembly, I begged them not to separate themselves from their privileges; I implored them even—against my personal inclination, for there, at least, I was no Turk—not to grow slender, if that meant agile excursions into loud spheres of lesser influence. Those others, I proceeded, would rapturously exchange a ballot for a seductive ankle, a graceful breast, or a flawless complexion. Complexion, or rather its absence, brought immeasurably more supporting votes to the women's party than convictions. And I added,

reprehensibly, some of the things I had been privately told, as a writer, by women newly in the professions: I expressed the secret of a lecturer on civic improvement—or it might have been better babies, I couldn't recall which—who carried a handbagful of apostrophes to Paolo and Francesca, and that illogical lot, on her travels. She permitted me to read them in a sunny orchard where the apples were already, more than ripe, on the ground; and her gaze had persistently strayed to the wasting fruit.

The audience melted away—I was unable to discover if they were flattered or annoyed—and I found myself actually seated at one of the small tables on the fringe of the dansant at the Sevilla. The Cascade Orchestra from the Biltmore, their necks hung with the imitation wreaths of Hawaii, were playing a musical pastiche of many lands and a single purpose; and there, fox-trotting intently among girls from the New York Follies and girls on follies of their own, colliding with race-track touts from Jefferson Park and suave, predatory gentlemen of San Francisco, I found a whole section of young Cuba.

They returned, in the intermissions, to chaperones complacent or secretly disturbed, where they had, principally, refrescos; but their attitude was one of progress and conscious, patronizing superiority to old-fashioned customs. The daughters of what,

in many aspects, was the Spanish-Cuban aristocracy of the island, were dancing publicly in an hotel. Here, already, was an example of emancipation. I disliked it, naturally, not on moral grounds, but because it foreshadowed the destruction of individuality, the loss, eventually, of Havana, of Cuba, of Spain . . . of everything distinguished that saved the world from monotony.

They danced—the Cuban youth—with notable facility, adding to the hesitation waltz something specially their own, a more intense rhythm, a greater potentiality; their bodies were at once more fluid and positive; they were swept up into a mood unknown to the adamant ornaments of Country Club verandas in the North. A cosmopolitan waiter, anxious to have me finish and move on, hovered about the table, ignorant of a traditional courtesy as well as of the requirements of the climate. All the objectionable features of Broadway cafés, of public ostentation, mingled servility and insolence, dishonesty—my pina colada was diluted beyond taste—were being flung, with the air of a favour, into Havana. Although, for the best, I was even then a little late, I was glad that I had seen the city when I did, just as I was glad to have known Venice before the Campanile fell, and the Virginian Highlands when they had not been modernized. The change of Havana within itself, from palm thatch to marble, was

entrancing; but the arbitrary imposition of stupid habits, standards, conduct, from outside damnable.

In the end the waiter was more forceful than my determination to remain until my drink and thoughts were at an end, and I rose with them uncompleted, in a very ill-temper. If Cuba hadn't enough innate taste and nationality to save herself she must go the popular way to obliteration. So much else had gone! But later, at the Hôtel de Luz, untouched yet by the hand of imported cupidity, my happiness in Havana returned.

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The Hôtel de Luz, inimitably Cuban, with the shipping lying vaguely behind an orderly foliage at the Muelle outside, had a dining-room partly divided by wooden screens that merged informally into the surrounding halls and spaces, and an air that was an accumulation of tradition, like an invisible film lying over everything. A multiplication of unexpected adventitious detail accomplished, in its entity, the strangeness, at once enticing and a little sinister, characteristic of Havana. There was, lurking about, in the darker corners and passages, a feeling almost of dread, uncomfortable to meet. And, exploring, I passed a room without windows, largely the colour of dried blood, the quintessence of a nightmare. The third floor, laid in a triangle of, perhaps,

ninety degrees, raised immense corridors paved in black and white marble blocks, down the long perspective of which moving figures were reduced to furtive mannikins and voices were lost in an upper murmur.

I sat, for a while, in a walnut rocking chair at an end of the sweep that amazed me by an architecture the impressiveness of which approached oppression. A wall was broken by a file of slatted doors, and from one of these came the minute, irritable clatter of a typewriter; the bell at the finish of a line sounded like the shiver of a tapped glass, and a child spoke. It was difficult to think of the Hotel de Luz as a place of normal residence, as existing at all except in the mental fantasias of Piranesi—it resembled exactly one of his sear vertiginous engravings. Yet it was, I knew, the favourite hotel of travellers from the Canary Islands.

Continuing to rock slightly and smoke I pursued the extremely recondite subject of just such impressions as I had there received; a very important inquiry, for it had to do with the secret, the unintelligible heart, of my writing. There was, obviously, in the Hotel de Luz nothing intrinsically terrifying, strange. My attitude toward it would be dismissed as absurd by the Canary Islanders. But the effect it produced on me was tangible, ponderable; it tyrannized over my imagination and

drove it into corridors of thought as sombre as that in reality before me. I had seen the Piranesi engravings when I was very young, and painfully susceptible to mental darkness and fears, they had undoubtedly left their indelible mark . . . now brought out by the black and white marble squares diminishing with the walls in parallel lines.

The reality of what I felt, then, lay in the combining of the surroundings and my imagination, a condition, a result, if not unique, at least unlikely to be often repeated. The sum of another emotional experience and the Hotel de Luz would be totally different but equally true with my own; and from that confusion misunderstanding arose. The actuality was neither concrete nor subjective, yet woven of these double threads it was absolute. The individuality of places and hours absorbed me; there was no word in English to express my meaning—the perception of the inanimate moods of place. It belonged, rather than to the novel, to the painter, and possibly occupied too great a space in my pages. Certainly houses and night and hills were often more vivid to me than the people in or out of them.

But it was no longer possible, if it had ever been, to disentangle one from the other, the personal from what seemed the impersonal; for, while nature was carelessly free from beauty and sentiment and morals, it had been invested with each

of these qualities in turn by a differently developing intelligence. The elements of nature, partly in hand, were arbitrarily and subconsciously projected in set forms. I stopped to think how the mobility of mind perpetually solidified, like cement, about itself; how fluid ideas, aspirations, always hardened into institutions, then prisons, then mortuary vaults. Religion had done this signally, both profoundly and superficially—it was impossible to picture the faith of John Fox under the frescoes of La Merced Church, a Methodist exuberance in St. Michael's at Richmond; the Roman ritual was as much a thing of its silver altars as the Episcopal Church in Virginia depended on historic communion services and austere box pews.

Not only was I specially intent on these values: my inability to see men as free from them, as spiritual conquistadores, had been a cause of difficulty in the popularity and sale of my books. I lacked both the conceptions of man, an Atlas, holding up the painted globe or of mounting as an individual into perpetuity. If the latter was true, if there was no death, the dignity of all the great tragic moments of life and art, the splendour of sacrifice, was cheapened to nothing. I would have gladly surrendered these for the privilege of continued existence—in a sphere not dominated by hymnology—but sceptical of the future, all I possessed, my sole ideal, was a passionate admira-

tion for the courage of a humanity condemned to the loss of warm life.

I had grown more serious than I intended—than, in Havana, was necessary. What I had set out to discover was simply the explanation of my feeling about the Hotel de Luz; but undoubtedly it was better for me to accept emotions, merely to record them, than attempt analysis. I had had very little schooling in processes of exact thought, practically no mental gymnastics. But this was not an imposed hardship on which I looked back with regret—I had been free to fill my life with scholastic routine, but balked absolutely: in classrooms a blankness like a fog had settled over me, and from which, after a short half-hearted struggle, I emerged to follow what, namelessly, interested me; in, for example, precisely the manner of my stay in Havana—a course for which the worst was predicted, specially since I persisted in writing. And I could see how I'd be censured by the frugal-minded for such a book as I was more than likely to bring to San Cristóbal de la Habana.

There was, in reality, no practical reason to write about it at all, since it had been admirably and thoroughly described, the sights, pleasures, and sounds, in reputable and laudatory paragraphs a source of pride to the natives. While no one could predict, in my search, what would seem important, to be transcribed—the coloured glass

above a window, the sugar at the bottom of a cocktail; and my moral sense, of course, would be as impotent as my political position was negligible. Yet the qualities ignored by a more solemn intelligence than mine were precisely what formed the spirit of Havana, their comprehension that perception of an inanimate mood of place.

I was constantly in a disagreement with the accepted opinion of what were, at bottom, the more serious facts, the determining pressures of existence; and it had always been at the back of my head to write a novel built from just such trivialities as, it seemed to me, enormously affected human fate. A very absorbing idea that had gone as far as an Introduction called A Preface of Imperishable Trifles; but the realization that I had begun in that manner, a suspicious circumstance in a novel, a story, where no shadow of an explanation, a justification, was permissible, led me to put it away.

It was the serious defect of the novel that it commonly resembled the mechanism of an ingenious lock where the key turned smoothly for the flinging open, at the appropriate moment, of a door upon a tableau of justice. It lacked almost entirely the fatalities of sheer chance, of inconsiderable accidents, which gave life its characteristic insecurity. I had left the Hotel de Luz for echoing stone galleries and streets and empty

paved plazas when I told myself that mine would have simply been a story of shifted emphasis, and for which I should have used my own memories, since I recalled the wall-paper of a music-room after thirty years more clearly than the details of my father's death, happening when I was practically mature. The unavoidable conclusion of this was that the paper, in a way I made no pretence to explain, bore upon me more deeply than my father; and, with that in view, it was perhaps as well that the story had remained unwritten.

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Some of these considerations returned to my mind the following afternoon, when my fancy had been captured by a woman on a balcony of the Malecón. The house was small, crushed between two imposing structures that had been residences but were now apartments, scarcely two stories, and set back of the line, with the balcony at a lower window. The woman was neither young nor lovely, but, folded in a shawl—it might have been one of the lost mantillas—she was invested with a melancholy dignity. It was possible, in the briefest passage, to see not only her history but the story of a decade, of a vanished greatness lingering through a last afternoon before extinction —a gesture of Spain finally submerged in the Western seas of scepticism.

I was extraordinarily grateful to her for standing wrapped with the shawl in immobile sadness. That was all I wanted from her, the most, indeed, she could give; apart from the balcony, hurrying along the street with the black lace drawn closely about her head, she would have been meaningless. The hour in which I saw her, too, the swiftly fading radiance, had its inevitable part in the effect she produced. I had, I realized, no wish to restore her to either youth or happiness, I didn't want to improve her, or the case of Spain, in any way; she was perfect for my purpose, so eminently selfish, as she was. In begging, in imagination, the women of Havana to remain on their balconies, I hadn't given a thought to their welfare or desires.

The truth was that I regarded them as a part of their iron grilling, figures on a canvas, the balconies and women inseparable from each other. It might well be that this was no more than the intolerable oppression of the past incongruously thrust into the present, and that at any minute the women, in righteous indignation and revolt, would step down into life. But if they were to do that I hoped it would be put off until I had returned to the land of the feminine free; I didn't want to be present when the balconies were definitely deserted for the publicity of the Sevilla. I should regret their loss heavily, those points of vantage gracefully ranged across the brilliant façades of Havana.

For there was no other city where balconies were so universal, so varied, and so seductive. I recalled a balcony high over the Rond Point de Plain-palais, in Geneva, where, on the left, could be seen the blue line of the Jura and on the right, through the mounting Rue de Carouge, the abrupt green cliff of the Salve. Curiously, there were a great many balconies in Geneva giving on many beautiful prospects—the Promenade des Bastions and La Treille, the Cité and bridged water; but they were no more than pleasant, they had no deep significance whatever. The balconies of Charleston were rather galleries turned privately on gardens and not upon the streets; while those over the banquettes of New Orleans, of the *vieux carré*, had long ago been emptied of their flowered muslins.

The popularity of balconies, their purpose, had remained, until now at least, largely unchanged in Havana. On Sol Street, in the neighbourhood of Oficios and where it met the harbour, they solidly terminated their tall windows, reached the heights of discreet tradition. There the way was so narrow that a head above must be bent forward to see what was passing, affording a clear view of high comb and bright lips, provocative in the intimacy of their suggestion. The balconies of the Malecón looked out, conversely, across the unbroken tide of the sea, in the afternoon, when it is

fair, a magical sweep of unutterable blue. Yet they have suffered a decline—as though the constant noise of automobiles had rent an evanescent spirit.

The women there might see, as they chose, either the parade of fashion or the grey walls and the far horizon; but from the balconies of the Prado only the former was visible, the whirling motor-cars and the pedestrians in the rows of Indian laurels. Here the balconies through the early and late evening were crowded; the chatter, the gesticulations and smiles, evident on the street. The clothes, however, were no longer Spanish in characteristic detail but Parisian; while the essential atmosphere, the colour, of the balconies remained. In carnival—I had just missed it—they were hung with serpentine and exchanged bombardments of roses and compliments with the street; but now their fastness, except to the flutter of a hand, was absolute.

I saw a group of girls at an impressive window of the Prado, on the corner of either Trocadero or Colon Street, all in white except for the clear scarlet of one, like a blazing camellia among gardenias; and for a day after their dark loveliness stayed in my mind. They had had tea, probably, in the corner of a high, cool room with a marble floor, furnished in pale gilt. I had no doubt that a piano had been played for a brief explanatory

dancing, the trial of new steps neither French nor Spanish, but American. Some of them, I knew, had been at school in New York, probably Miss Spence's, where balconies were not cultivated, and I wondered what they thought about the Havana to which they had returned. Well, if the Cuban men, the fathers and suitors and husbands, preferred to keep the historic architecture of their society, of their climate, a convent of some Sacred Heart would be wiser than a celebrated American finishing school.

The New York scene, however carefully veiled and chaperoned, was a disquieting preparation for the Prado, or even Vedado. What the life on an estancia was I couldn't imagine; I had been told that, for a woman, oftener than not, it was still a model of Castilian rigidity. It had, in fact, been suggested to me that I write the story of such a girl, shut away from everything that she had been permitted to see and desire. Unquestionably a splendid subject, one of the vessels that would hold everything an ability could pour into it. I realized at once which, in that individual struggle, must conquer—the heredity of Cuba would be more powerful than an isolated feminine need. The other women, the elders, who surrounded her, would be as relentless as any husband, and in the end she'd become fat and listless.

Widely different balconies had held my attention

—on one, flooded with the morning sun, two women with carnation cheeks and elaborately dressed hair, but for the rest strikingly informal, laughed an invitation to me that took no account of the hour. They were, I suppose, tawdry, the cheap familiars of a cheap street; but the gay orange wall where they lounged like the painted actors of a zarzuela, their yellow satin slippers and shoulders impudently bare above chemises pink and blue, all gave them a certain distinction. Again, in the section of Jesus del Monte, there were buildings brilliantly and impossibly painted, usually with cafés on the ground, whose balconies, exposed to an intolerable heat, overlooked dingy, sun-baked fields. They were always empty. . . . I could never imagine their use—for there was not only nothing to see but no one to be seen by. The houses of Havana, admirable in the closeness of the city, possible in a bougainvillia-smothered suburb, were depressingly inappropriate to any contact with the country. They were lost, detached or strayed away from their fellows; for the happy plan of the country house was that of exposure to all the favourable winds that blew, to verandas and open halls rather than balconies and patios: it was merged into vistas and not relentlessly closed on every face.

A fact that had nothing to do with the tropics or the outskirts of Havana, where wide, dusty

stone avenues dropped abruptly in soft roads, and the balconies were added purely from habit. My own balcony, at the Hotel Inglaterra, was ideally placed, with its command of an angle of the Parque Central. I often sat there before dinner, or past the middle of night; there was always, then, a wind stirring over San Rafael Street; but the balconies on either side of me, above and below, were invariably empty, their purpose, it was plain, mistrusted.

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The patios of Havana, turned so uncompromisingly from the street, were, perhaps for that reason, even more engaging than the balconies. I saw them, except those of the Government buildings and others semi-public, through opening or half-open doors, or sometimes I looked down into them from superior heights. They, too, were countless in variety, from the merest kitchen areas and places of heaped refuse to lovely garden rooms of flowers and glazed tiling and fountains. This sense of privacy, of enclosure, in a garden was their most charming feature; and the possibilities and implications of a patio created a whole social life with which I was necessarily unfamiliar. They were, usually, in the hours I knew them, empty but for passing servants . . . obviously their time was late afternoon or evening; fixed to the inner

walls were the iron brackets of lamps, and it was easy to imagine them dimly lighted and flooded with perfume, with the scent of magnolias and the whisper of the fountains.

These details, separately, were not rare, but shut into the masonry of Havana, their beauty shown in momentary glimpses on streets of blank walls, their fragrance drooping into unexpected barren places, the patios stirred my inherent desires. As usual, I didn't want to be gazing at them from without, but to be a part of their existence; I wanted to sleep on one, in a room nothing but a stone gallery, or watch the moonlight slip over the leaves of the crape myrtles and the tiles and sink into the water. But not to-day, for there were discordant sounds through the arches with slender twisted Moorish pillars—the subdued harshness of mechanical music, the echoes of that dissatisfaction which is everywhere now recognized as improvement. I demanded guitars.

The masculine chords of the guitar, the least sentimental of instruments, as the Spaniards were the least sentimental of people, the deep vibration of resinous-stopped strings, was the perfect accompaniment to that colour visible and invisible. Invisible! Always that first and most potent. The perpetuity of atmosphere through transmitted feeling was far more absorbing than the other chimera, of incorruption. It was tradition, more

than moonlight, that steeped the patios with kindled obscure romantic longings. Within their formal squares they held the spirit of a great history and of two great races, two continents. They, the patios, were the East in the West, the Moroscos on the Peninsula.

The dress of the present, even the floating films of the women, was misplaced; these were, in reality, the courtyards of the Orient, and they needed the dignity of grave robes and gestures, bearded serenity. In them, initially, women had been flowers lightly clasped with bands of rubies and dyed illusory veils; there had been no guitars then, but silver flutes. However, I had no desire to be a part of that time; it was Spain that possessed me, and not in Granada, but Cuba, during the captain-generalship of the Conde de Ricla, in the seventeen-sixties, when the British conquests under Albemarle were returned to the island. That was a period of building and prosperity, the fortifications San Carlos and Atares were established, Morro and the Cabañas rebuilt, and the streets and houses of Havana named and numbered. The decline of Spain, a long, imperceptible crumbling, had already begun, but its effect was not visible in Cuba; there still was a Castilian arrogance burned more brown, more vivid, by the Caribbean.

A little late for the plate ships sailing in cloudy companies and filling Havana with the swords of

Mexico and Peru; but my mind and inclinations were not heroic; I could dispense with Pizarro's soldiers, fanciful with the ornaments of the Incas, for the quiet of walled gardens, the hooped brocades of court dresses, all the transplanted grace of the city and hour. Climate was greater than man, and the first Cubeños, dead in the mines of Cobre, were being revenged for the usurpation of their happiness and land; the negroes of the slave trade, too, were repaying their chains to the last ounce of misery. But these counter-influences were not perceptible yet in the patios, just as the French Revolution had still to scatter the polite pastorals only to survive in the canvases of Boucher and Watteau.

It was, in Havana as well as Seville, the farewell of true formality, for after that it became only a form. No one, afterwards, was to bow instinctively as he left a room or dance to the measures of Beethoven and Mozart. A useless plant cut down by a rusty scythe! The elegance of Cuba, however, changing into later Victorianism, was, in the time of de Ricla, greatly enhanced by its surrounding, by the day before yesterday when there had only been thatched bohios where now were patios of marble. Those quiet spaces were sentient with all this, just as the patios of the churches held the sibilant whisper of the sandals of the Inquisition, an order already malodorous and expelled

from the island by Antonio Maria Bucarely, the following Captain-General.

But even yet it would be possible, with the details carefully arranged, to find an emotional situation in a patio undisturbed since the middle eighteenth century; for the revenge of the Cubeños and of Africa, of the red and the black slaves, was that, with the faint or full infusion of their bloods into their conquerors, dwindled unintelligible desires and dreamlike passions entered as well. A discoloration of the mind as actual as the darkening of the skin! And I pictured an obscure impulse buried in the personality of a sensitive and reserved man, such a trait as, at moments of extreme pressure, would betray him into a hateful savagery; or it might be better brought out by a galling secret barbarity of taste. The Spain of Philip, primitive Africa, and a virginal island race constrained into one body and spirit must be richly dramatic.

It was imperative to regard the patios in such a light, with a strong infusion of reality, for, half-apprehended, they produced that thin tinkling note of sham romance; they lacked, for a ready susceptibility, the impressions of *opera bouffe* . . . a danger constantly present in my thoughts. As it was I'd be accused again of avoiding the actual and the difficult for an easy unreality; but there was at least this to be said for what I had, in

writing, laid back in point of time—no one had charged me with an historical novel.

There was another, perhaps safer, attitude toward the balconies and patios of Havana, to regard them in an unrelieved mood of realism, to show them livid with blue paint and echoing with shrill misery, typhoid fever and poverty. If I did that automatically a number of serious critical intellects would give me their withheld support, they would no longer regard me as a bright cork floating thoughtlessly over the opaque depths of life. Well, they could—they'd have to—go to the devil; for I had my own honesty to serve, my own plot to tend, a plot, as I have said, where, knowing the effort hopeless, I tried only to grow a flower spray. If I could put on paper an apple-tree rosy with blossom someone else, and welcome, might discuss the economy of the apples.

Or, in Havana, of the oranges. In the meanwhile the patios gave me an inexhaustible pleasure. Sometimes the walls were glazed with tiles and the octagonal surface of the fountain held the reflected tracery of bamboo, while a royal palm towered over the balusters of the roof and hanging lamps were crowned with fretted metal. Another, with its flags broken and the basin dry, was deserted except for the soundless flame-like passage of chromatic lizards; still another was bare, with solid, deep arcades and shadows on the ground,

and a second gallery of gracefully light arches. There was, in one, a lawn-parasol in candy-coloured stripes with low wicker chairs and gay cushions; on a table some tall glasses elbowed a syphon, English gin, and a silver dish of limes, and a blue-and-yellow macaw was secured to a black lacquer stand.

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That, evidently, was not characteristic of Havana, and yet the city absorbed it, made it a part of a complex richness, a complexity as brilliantly blended as a rainbow. At first I had been entranced by the sudden colourful display, it had seemed to be in one marvellously high key; but now I recognized that it was composed of the entire scale, and that there were notes profoundly dark. I should have known that, for I had been, when I was much younger, a painter, and I had learned that surfaces which seemed to be in one tone were made up of a hundred. The city, of course, was an accumulation of the men who had made it, the women who had lived there; and it was possible that Havana had as intense and varied a foundation as any place that had existed.

Not in the sense, the historical importance of, for example, Athens: I had already said that Havana was a city without history, which was true in the cumulative, inter-human meaning of that

term. But it had, within its limits, on its island like a flower in air, an amazing and absorbing past. In the beginning, where Spain was concerned, Cuba, a fabulous land, had promised fabulous gold; but the empires of the Aztecs and Peru, incalculably richer, and the fatal dream of eternal youth in Florida, had robbed it of royal interest, of men, food, and ships. It had settled back, lost to most concern beyond a perfunctory colonial administration, into a region of agriculture, affected only indirectly by, and affecting not at all, the universal upheaval elsewhere. Within Havana itself, then, moulded by the burning sun, the cooling night winds, and the severing water, a peculiarly essential human development had taken place. And its history was, for this reason, elusive, most difficult to grasp; hopelessly concealed from a mere examination of bastions.

One by one the colours of its fantastic design grew clearer to me, period by period the streets and people became intelligible, until they reached the middle century era to which I was so susceptible. To arrive, with the ingredients of a tropical Spain and the pirates of the world, at an early Victorianism was a mystery which demanded a close investigation. That air enveloped all the centre of the city, its paseos and plazas and buildings, and still influenced the social life. This, I finally decided, came from the fact that the archi-

tectural spirit which dominated Havana was of the period before Eastlake; or at least I was not familiar with any structures erected in such a style, so lavishly marble, since then.

There was no absence of modernity in the wharves and streets, but that loud impetuous tide poured through the ways of a quieter water, and in the side passages the sound diminished. Havana was a great port, but the steam shipping along its waterfront was incongruous with the low, tranquil whiteness, the pseudo-classicism, of the buildings that held along the bay. The latter particular, elaborated from my first impression, carried the city back to the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. I had no intention of examining the dates of numerous structures, but the stamp of their time was on the Ionic entablatures. Then women, as well, had copied in their dress the symbol of the Greek column, of sculpture instead of painting, except for the charming and illogical innovation of turbans; and they went about in sandals and gowns falling straight from their looped breasts. Such a figure, with her head bound in vermilion, must have been enticing in the great shaded bare rooms. There must have been, too, an extraordinary assemblage of negro pages and major-domos in ruby silks and canary and velvet.

The feminine silhouette changed remarkably in

thirty years, from a column to a cone, from the ultimate in flowing lines to a bouquet-like rigidity; and the severity of furnishings, of incidentals, expanded in queer elaborations. It was, notably, a period of prudery, of all which, objectively, I disliked; while at the same time there had been the undercurrent of licence that always accompanied an oppressive hypocrisy. This, I could see, was true of its age in Havana; men—the real prudes—had been heavily whiskered at home with a repressed morality, and betrayed in another quarter by heredity and the climate. Two periods that, except for some beautiful books, had been steeped in an ugliness from which the world had not recovered. Indeed, while it was now fashionable to deride them, the present was, in some ways, perceptibly worse; literature was, perhaps, bolder in scope, but it showed hardly more than a surprise at the sound of its comparative liberty of speech. The art of painting had burst into frantic fragments that might or might not later be assembled into meaning; the architecture had degenerated into nothing more than skilful or stupid adaptation.

In the large disasters that were sweeping the world, the mad confusion of injustice and revolt, of contending privilege, the serene primness of Havana, its starched formality of appearance, offered a priceless quietude. It was, at once, static and mobile, a place of countless moods that merged

at the turning of a corner, the shifting of a glance from La Punta to the circular bandstand at the foot of the Prado. Never pedantic, it was a city more for the emotions than the intellect; intellect, in its astigmatic conceit, had largely overlooked Havana; and Havana had missed little enough. Its monuments and statues, where they were complacently innocent of art, had been brought into harmony of tone by the atmosphere vivid like the flambeau-trees, the inconceivable blueness of its sea. The colours of the houses, glaringly or palely inappropriate, were melted and bound into inevitable rightness. Even the cemetery, frosted with tombs like a monstrous iced cake, its shafts that might have been the crystallized stalagmites of the caves of death, resembled nothing more disturbing than the lacy pantalets of the time it celebrated. It was the final accomplishment of mid-Victorian horror, with its pit of mouldering bones and solemn ritualistic nonsense; yet the thought of the ponderous gold-and-black catafalques rolling in procession between the horizontal white slabs, of the winking candles—all the ghastly appendages of religious undertaking—and the clergy in purple and fine cambric, with amethyst rings on their fat or their thin fingers, gave it the feeling of a remote memory.

The cemetery from which I escaped with relief and the café where I entered with pleasure, again

the Telegrafo, flowed together in the city's general impression. I could see the statue of Marti, and, as I looked, it changed into the statue of Isabel; then that, too, vanished. The broad paved avenue, the flagged walks, became a gravelled plaza about which the girls promenaded in one direction to pass constantly the youths circling in the other. The vision flickered and died, and I went on to lunch through the Havana of so many days smoothly packed into one.

I felt that my first sense of instinctive familiarity had been justified; yet, in the corridor of the Inglaterra, asked by a traveller how to get to a restaurant, the Dos Hermanos, I was unable to reply; and a third American, brushing me aside, gave him voluble instructions. It ended by his being taken out and seated in a hack, while the other, in angry, execrable and fluent Spanish, told the driver where to proceed. Whatever I had learned, it seemed, was of no practical value; my multiple sensations were not reducible to the simplest demand. A woman passed with a copy of an ultra-popular novel, and this recalled the long struggle of my early books for the smallest recognition. If this dark frame of mind had fastened on me in the North it would have burdened me for a day; but in Havana, with the Marquis de Riscal and a Por Larrañaga, I envied no mediocre novelist her stereotyped laurels. It was impossible to get

anywhere a better wine or a cigar that changed more soothingly from the brown of fact to blue fancy.

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The Cuban cigarettes, however, were too strong for pleasure; for, while the preference for a strong cigar was admissible, cigarettes should be mild. All those famous were. Strangely enough, good cigarettes had never been smoked in the United States, a land with an overwhelming preference for the cheap drugged tobacco called Virginia. No one would pay for a pure Turkish leaf; with the exception of a few hotels and clubs it was not procurable. There was a merchant on the Zulueta with a large assortment of Cuban cigarettes, made in every conceivable shape and paper, hebra and arroz and pectoral. They had tips of gilt or silver paper, cork, straw, and coloured silks, and were packed in enticing ways and odd numbers. But, after trying their apparent variety, they all seemed alike, as coarse and black in flavour as their tobacco.

There were, of course, men who disagreed with me—though women never liked a Cabañas or Henry Clay cigarette—and a connection of mine, a judge, long imported from Cuba, through Novotny of New York, the Honoradez tobacco for his cigarettes. He had been in Havana during

the Spanish occupation, and later; and, recalling him, I could see that he, like myself, possessed an ineradicable fondness for it. In his case, even, his memories might have affected his exterior, for he had a lean darkness more appropriate to the Calzada del Cerro than Chester County. In summer particularly, with his immaculate linens, and the brown cigarette casting a pungent line of smoke from his long, sensitive fingers, he was the image of a Spanish colonial gentleman.

He had known Havana at a better time than now, when it was more provincial, simpler, the hotels then were uncompromisingly locked at ten in the evening, and if he returned later he was forced to call the negro sleeping in the hall. I don't remember where he stayed, probably at the Inglaterra. I was young and ignorant of Cuba when I saw him with a certain frequency, before he died; and I heard his talk about the Parque Central with no greater interest than his discussions of salmon fishing, of sun-and-planet reels and rods split and glued. I realized sharply what I had missed, both in the way of detail—the detail most important to a mental picture and always missing—and in intimate understanding of Cuban affairs. For he had a tonic mind, rare in America, unsentimental and courageous, and touched with a satirical quality disastrous to sham, social, religious, or political.

The cigarettes came to him in bright tin boxes of a hundred; and, after his death, I bought seven from Novotny and smoked the contents almost by way of a memorial; for he was a personality of a type almost gone. Judges of County Courts no longer wore immaculate high hats to the Bench, with the vivid corner of a bandanna handkerchief visible in the formality of their coat-tails.

The silk-tipped cigarettes were for women, but the silk was principally a villainous carmine, a colour fatal to the delicate charm of lips, and I hoped that I'd see none so thoughtless as to smoke them. While the cigarettes all of tobacco were, frankly, impossible. Why I couldn't say; they simply wouldn't do. What women I saw smoking in public, in the cafés and at the races, were not Cubans. They, on view, neither smoked nor drank anything but refrescos. But a different feminine world, at their doors or over the counters of bodegas, enjoyed long formidable cigars.

An amusing convention, a prejudice really; an act, in women, condemned from the associations in men's minds, synonymous with that gaiety they so painstakingly kept out of their homes. Yet, in spite of them, women smoking had become a commonplace in the United States. In Havana men were still paramount . . . and Victorian. On the Obispo cigarette-cases from Toledo, of steel inlaid with gold, were for sale; but I'd had experi-

ence with Toledo work—the steel rusted. For years I'd bought cigarette-cases and holders before I finally learned that the former were a nuisance and that the latter destroyed the flavour of tobacco. I had owned cases in metal and leather and silk, patented and plain, and one by one they were mislaid and given away. I had smoked with holders of ivory and jet and tortoise-shell, wood and amber and quills, and they, too, had disappeared. All that could be said for them was that they looked well and they saved the fingers from nicotine stains.

The Turkish cigarettes in Havana were unremarkable, yet, for the Cuban youth, the sign of worldliness. They disdained the local brands, but even Cuba was powerless to depreciate her cigars, the best of all countries and all times. Here was an accomplishment, a possession, of unique importance and excellence, for tobacco belonged to the irreducible number of necessities. I had survived prohibition, with the assistance of a forethought unhappily limited in execution; but if the absurdity of my country abolished tobacco I'd be forced to move to England; that would be too much. I could imagine, in this case, what comments would appear in the press, reminding the virtuous and patriotic that my books had always been chargeable with immorality and a blindness to the splendour of our national ideals.

In the past I had suffered a particularly wretched nervous breakdown—it hit me like a bullet in the Piazzo della Principe in Florence; and when I had politely been sent to Switzerland to die an English doctor at Geneva cured me, for most practical purposes, by impatience, black coffee, and Shepherd's Hotel cigarettes. I had no doubt that smoking was, in many ways, a very deleterious habit; but life itself was a bad habit condemned to the worst of ends. I was, as well, very apt to have little in common with men who didn't smoke, or, I should say, with men who had never smoked. They were, with practically no exceptions, precisions, and ate, lived, for their health rather than for the tang of delicate sauces and sensations. While a long while ago a wise and charming woman had lamented to me the fact that all the generosity and attractiveness she met in men belonged to what were colloquially called drunks. . . . Her feeling was the same as mine.

I wasn't defending drunkenness nor attacking the statistics against smokers; what I felt, I think, in such men was the presence of a fallibility to which, at awkward or tragic moments, they yielded and so became companions of sorrow and charity, the great temperers of humanity. At any rate, I demanded enough liberty, at least, to fill my system with smoke if I willed. The possibility that my act might hurt someone else failed to

excite me. Why should I bother with him when I wasn't concerned about myself? There was too much officious paternity in the air, too many admonitions, and not enough lightness of heart—of tobacco heart, if necessary.

In addition, I wasn't sure that I wanted to be perfectly sanitary in mind and body, any more than I was certain of the complete desirability of a perfected world, of heaven. At once, there, my lifelong occupation would be gone—novelists never stopped to think what would happen to them if all the reforms for which they shouted should go into effect; and I had a disturbing idea that a great deal of my pleasure in life came from feelings not always admissible in—shall I say?—magazines of a general character. A clean mind and a pure heart were not without chilling suggestions of emotional sterility. Since men had hopelessly and for ever departed from the decency of simple animals I wanted to enjoy the silken and tulle husks that remained. If there was a sedative in cigars, an illusion in a Daiquiri cocktail, I proposed to enjoy it at the expense of a problematic month or year more of life always open to the little accidents of pneumonia or spoiled milk or motors.

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What might be called the minor pleasures of life, but which in their bulk were vastly more important

than the great moments, Havana had carried to a high state of perfection; yet with, where I was concerned, an exception not in favour of the theatre. I went, as I had determined, to whatever offered, swept along by the anticipation of Spanish dancing and music; the first was immeasurably the best in existence, and I liked the harsh measures of Spanish melody, both the native songs of the countryside and the sophisticated arrangements of Valverde. A great many skilful writers had described, and their accounts were well enough; but, politely, they all lacked the fundamental brutality of the jota and malagueña, just as the foreign, operatic variations of Spanish themes were reminted in a smooth and debased universal coin.

I purchased a ridiculously flimsy scrap of paper which, I was assured, made me the possessor of a grille principal at the Pairet Theatre—a box as huge as it was bare within the stage. I could see, under the hood, the long, dramatic hand of the prompter waving to the droning monotony of his voice through the stupidest performance I remembered. It was, by turn, a comedy, a farce, a pantomime, and a comic opera, and a complete illustration of the evils of departing from national tradition and genius. It was a dreary attempt at the fusion of Vienna and New York planned, obviously, for a cosmopolitan public superior to the rude familiar strains of gypsies.

At intervals a chorus of young women, whose shrill excitement belied their patent solidity, made an incongruous appearance and declamation; they grouped themselves in feeble designs, held for a moment of scattered applause, and went off with a laboured lightness that threatened even their ankles. This was bad, but a revista—I could think of nothing else to call it—at the Marti was, because it was so much better, worse. There I had an ordinary palco, enclosed by a railing from the promenade and elevated above the body of an audience composed of every possible shade from fairest noon to unrelieved midnight. The evening was divided into two performances, for the second of which, Arco-Iris, the much larger price was demanded. This was, again, Vienna and Broadway, but with, in addition, an elaboration of colour and lighting ultra-modern in intent.

I had seen the same effort ten years before in Paris, and the failure was as marked in Spanish as in French. Mr. Ziegfield, assisted by the glittering beauty of the girls he was able to secure, had made such spectacles brilliantly and inimitably his own. The Latins knew nothing, really, about legs; they showed them with what was no more than a perfunctory bravado, while it was a peculiarity of shoulders—the art of which they so daringly comprehended—that their effect was lost in mass. The display, the extravagant settings and costumes,

of Arco-Iris, was, throughout, mechanical; the coryphées were painfully aware of their dazzlements; and an Andalusian number, looked forward to with weary eagerness, had been deprived of every rude and vigorous suggestion of its origin.

When I returned to the Inglaterra I demanded from a clerk where I could find a vulgar performance of, for instance, the habanera, but he shook his head doubtfully. At intervals, he admitted, Spanish dancers came to the National Theatre; but—his manner brightened—Caruso was expected in May. I had no intention of staying in Havana through May; and, had I been there, I'd have avoided Caruso . . . a singer murdered by the Victrola. Already the seats for his concerts were a subject for speculation, and it was clear that they would reach a gigantic price, between forty and sixty dollars for a single place in the orchestra. In this depressing manner Havana made it evident that it was a city both fashionable and rich.

There had been a time, too, I was informed, when all the uncensored moving pictures of the world found a home in Cuba; pictures where embraces were not limited to a meagre number of feet, nor layettes, the entire ramifications of procreation, prohibited. But these were gone from the general view. The films, though, had not been destroyed, and for some hundreds of dollars a private performance might be arranged. But this I declined. The

moving picture industry had been brought entirely from America, the theatres plastered with Douglas Fairbanks' set grin, William Farnum's pasty heroics, and Mary Pickford's invaluable aspect of innocence. Never, in the time I was in Cuba, did I see a Spanish actor or film announced; although a picture, appropriate to Lent, of the Passion hinted at a different spirit.

I became, then, discouraged by the formal entertainments. As usual, I was too late; the process of improvement had everywhere marched slightly ahead of me, substituting for the genuine note a borrowed false emphasis. To-morrow I'd hear the Salvation Army bawling in Obispo Street. In a state of indifference I went to Carmelo, a dancing pavilion with an American cabaret, and drifted to the table where the singing and dancing profession were having their inevitable sandwiches and beer. A metallic young person, with brass hair, a tin voice, and a leaden mind, conversed with me in the special social accent of her kind, ready in advance with a withering retort for any licentious proposals, while beside her sat a Mexican with an easy courtesy and an enigmatic past. He was, I gathered, the son of an official who, in one of the exterminating changes of government, had escaped over a wall in his pearl studs and dinner coat, but little else.

I liked everything about him but his indulgence

for soda blondes; yet in the serious conversation we at once opened—connected with a projected trip of mine to the City of Mexico—we forgot the girl, until, exasperated by our neglect, she lost some of her manner in an inane exclamation made, she announced, for the sake of Christ. Her companion immediately returned to his engagement, and I watched the Americans more or less proficient in that dance the name of which had been borrowed from a woman's undergarment. It had begun as a chemise, but what it would end in was problematic.

Was it a healthy rebellion against the prudery of repression, or the adventitious excitation of imminent impotence? Whatever had brought it about, it was stupid, an insensate jiggling of the body without frankness or grace. I hadn't yet seen the Cuban rumba, with its black grotesque negrito and sensual mulata; but I was confident that if a rumba were started at Carmelo, the shimmy would resemble the spasmodic vibrations of a frigid St. Vitus's dance. The men and women doing it, galvanized by drink and the distance from their responsibilities, animated by the Cuban air, were prodigiously abandoned. They were, mostly, commercial gentlemen and stiff brokers, investigating sugar securities, or the genial obese presidents and managers of steamship companies. The presidents, the managers and brokers, were

invariably accompanied by their wives, who, for the most part, endeavoured to recreate the illusions and fervours of earlier days; but Heaven knew from where came the women for whom the representatives of Yankee merchandise were responsible.

Their origins were as mysterious as their age—strange feminine derelicts stranded by temperament and mischance, caught in the destructive web of the tropics. The dresses they wore were either creations or makeshifts, but their urbanity was as solidly enamelled as their hair was waved or marcelled. There was still another variety—I had seen them before at expensive fishing camps—tightly skirted, permanently yellow-haired, with stony faces and superfine diamonds. Drunk or sober, their calmness was never changed by as much as a flicker; they caught sail fish in the Gulf Stream, danced, ate, talked, and now, certainly, were flying, with the same hard imperturbability and display, in gold mesh bags, of their unlimited crisp money in high denominations—the granite women on the wall of the Gallego Club.

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My interest, however, in the American in Havana had vanished, my position in life avoidance rather than protest, and I surrendered him to the hospitality of Cuba and the gambling concessions. I wanted, from then on, only the local scene: there

were cities where the foreigners, the travellers, made an inseparable part of the whole, but this was not true of Havana; it remained, in spite of the alien clamour, singularly undisturbed, intact, in essence. But a few streets, a plaza or two, knew the sound of English, and beyond these the voices, the stores, the preoccupations were without any recognition of other people or needs. I began to wander farther from the cafés of the Parque Central, the open familiarity of the sea, and find myself in situations where, in my lack of Spanish, I was limited to the simplest, most plastic, desires.

It was in this manner that I found earrings, which I secured with a sense of treasure—they were in the shop of a woman who sold embroidered linen from Madeira and the Canary Islands, lying haphazard in the lid of a pasteboard box. The patio opened directly from the front room, the store, an informal assemblage of dull white folded cloths and frothy underclothes, and outside a very large family indeed was eating the noon breakfast, while a pinkly naked pointer dog lay on the cool tiles with his feet extended stiffly upward.

I was paying for some towels, and regretting—in a singular composite of inappropriate words and banal smiles—the interruption of the meal, when I saw the earrings; and immediately, in the face of all the warning and advice wasted on me, I exclaimed that I wanted them. At this, they

were laid on the counter, a reasonable price murmured, and the transaction was over. I gathered that they had been left for sale by some member of an old Cuban house, perhaps by Baeza y Carvajal or Nuñez: they were of pale hand-carved and drawn gold, aged gold as yellow as a lemon, one pair of open circles a half-inch in diameter, with seed pearls, the other the shape of small delicate leaves with pearls and topazes.

A store unmarked in exterior, but surprising within, attracted me by some Chinese-Spanish shawls, mantones, in a dusty showcase, and I discovered a short heavily built Spaniard stringing the hair of a wig against a background of scintillating costumes, for the carnivals, balls, and masks. We were unable to understand each other, his wife wrinkled her forehead in desperation over my Spanish; and then, gesticulating violently, she vanished to reappear with a neighbour, a woman who seemed to have suffered all the personal misfortunes reserved for school teachers, who made intelligible a small part of what we said.

They had, it developed, other shawls, shawls worth my attention; one, in particular, finer even than any of Maria Marco's. This engaged me at once, for Maria Marco was the prima donna of a Madrid company that had sung in the United States two years before, and which had given me, perhaps, as great pleasure as anything I had seen

on the stage. But not so much for the singing—it had been the dancer, Doloretes, who captivated me, a woman as brilliant as the orange-red shawl draped before me over a chair; suddenly, tragically, dead in New York.

The wig-maker had had charge of the wardrobe of "The Land of Joy," and he assured me again that not Maria Marco . . . Abruptly there was spread the sinuous fringed expanse of a blazing green shawl, heavily embroidered in white flowers. I had never encountered a clearer, more intense green or a whiter white; and, before I had recovered from the delightful shock of that, a second shawl of zenith blue was flung beside it. The body of the crêpe-de-chine, the weight of the embroidery, the beautiful knotting of the short fringe—long fringe was an error—and their sheer loveliness, made them more desirable than jewels; and, prepared to buy them at once at the price of whatever fiction anyone wanted me to write, and would pay absurdly for, I was lifting their heavy folds when a third mantone was produced burning with all the gorgeous and violent colours imaginable.

It was, I suppose, magenta, a magenta of a depth and wickedness impossible for any but Eastern dye, the magenta of a great blossom of hell, and it was embroidered with flowers like peonies, four spans across, in a rose that was vermilion, a vermilion that was scarlet, and the calyxes were

orange and gamboge, emerald and peacock-blue and yellow. There were, too, golden roses, already heavy and drooping with scent in the bud, small primitive blossoms with red hearts, dark green leaves and dense maroon coronals starred in white. The dripping fringe was tied in four different designs . . . .

I asked its price at once, in order to dispose of what couldn't help being painful in the extreme, and he told me with an admirable appearance of ease and inconsequence. The shop, that had been only half lighted by the door, was now tumultuous with colour, with China and Andalusia; the shawl was the Orient and Spain, brutal in its superbness and as exasperating, as audible, as castanets. However I might act, hesitate, visibly, I knew that I'd buy it—in an instant it had become as imperative to me as a consuming vice. It belonged, rightfully, to the mistress of a Zuluoga or of a Portuguese king, to someone for whom money was not even an incident. I couldn't afford it even if I wove it into a story with a trace, a glimmer, of its splendour, but the next day the shawl was in my room.

Oppressed by a sense of monetary insanity not unfamiliar to me—I was very apt to buy an Airedale terrier or a console table with the sum carefully gathered for an absolute necessity—I set about turning my new possession into paragraphs and

chapters; and it occurred to me that it had a justified place in the Havana story I had already, mentally, begun. The polite young men of the time, the decorative youth of all times, were apt to have collectively a passion for a fascinating or celebrated actress; and I saw that such a person —Doloretes—would be important to my plan. Yes, my young figure and his fellows would go nightly to see her dance.

Afterward, crowded about a marble-topped table and helados, they would discuss her every point with fervent admiration. Yet she would be too vivid, too special, to take the foreground—I had wanted no paramount women in the first place—and I decided . . . to kill her almost at once, to have her as a memory. My boy, most certainly, would find her shawl exactly as I had; and, bringing it to his room, solemnly exhibit it to his circle. More than that, I realized, it had given me a title, The Bright Shawl. I instantly determined to cast the story in the form of a memory, told me by an old man of his youth; and that time, torn by unhappiness, indecision, and hopeless aspirations, should be made, in remembrance, brilliant and desirable, wrapped in the bright shawl which transformed the lost past.

A remarkably good story, I thought enthusiastically; and I fell to speculating if George Lorimer would print it. He would give it, I told myself,

a wide margin of chance; but, in writing, uncomfortable necessities often turned up in the course of narrative—I could leave them out, and damn myself, or keep them and, maybe, damn the story in the sense of its making possible my writing at all. Not that Mr. Lorimer personally had any regard for emasculated chapters, but he was addressed primarily to another integrity than mine; our purposes were not invariably coincident. A wonderful editor, strong and for that reason dangerous—a man to be met with a chin, a gaze, as direct as his own.

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What was noticeable in "The Bright Shawl" was that I hadn't gone out for material, but it had come to me, scene by scene, emotion by emotion. I'd never been able deliberately to set about collecting the facts for a proposed story; I could never tell what impulse, necessity, would be strong enough to overcome the laborious effort necessary to its realization in words. For this reason I was free to see what I chose, without reference to any ulterior purpose; and when, on a Sunday morning when the heat was tempered by a breeze lingering from the night, I started for the cockfighting at the suburb of Jesus del Monte, I was completely at ease. I had decided in favour of the cockpit both because it was essentially Cuban

and because I had always detested chickens, particularly roosters.

It was a thing of total indifference to me what—with steel spurs or without—roosters did to each other. Alive they were a constant galling caricature, a crude illuminative projection, of men at their ridiculous worst. Their feathered tails, their crowing, their propensity to search for bits in the dung, their sheer roosterness, together with the sly hypocrisy of hens, had always annoyed me individually. And, rather than not, I looked forward to seeing them victimized by their own belligerent conceit.

I had to leave my cab for an informal way behind some buildings and across grass, and, as I approached a false stucco façade, a determined ringing crowing filled the air. Beyond the arched entrance there was an area of pavement with tables and a limited café service; and, seated near, was a grave individual with a shovel beard and a thoroughly irritated rooster upside down in his lap. He was cementing a natural spur over one that had been injured, and drinking, now and again, from a cup of coffee at his hand. Beyond was the pit, like, as much as anything, a tall circular corn crib, painted white, with a cupola. There was place for about three hundred, with box-like seats whose low hinged doors opened directly on the sawdust of the arena, more casual chairs, and—as at the

pelota—space for standing on the middle tiers. There was a box above the entrance, and another opposite, and this, together with an enormous woman in white embroidery and carpet slippers, I occupied.

A main had just been finished, and there was a temporary lull in the noise inseparable in Cuba from sport. The sawdust was being freshly sprinkled, when a negro entered the ring with an animated bag; and, noting the elaborate polished brass scales that hung from the centre of the roof, I gathered that the birds were to be weighed. The second was produced, tightly bagged, by a highly respectable appearing man, of unimpeachable whiteness and side whiskers, and the roosters were left to dangle from the yard. It was to be a battle *al peso*, by weight and equal spurs; the first condition satisfied, the spurs were measured by a graduated set of pewter tallies; and the uproar was released.

It was deafening—a solid shouting of bets offered in a voice of fury, together with acceptance, repudiations, personification, and the frenzied waving in air of handfuls of money. The two men with the roosters advanced toward each other and wooden lines laid in the pit, prodding and otherwise increasing the natural ill-humour of their birds, and held the shorn heads close for a vicious preliminary peck. The roosters' legs, shaved to an indecent

crimson, were bare of hold—every superficial feather had been clipped; and when they hit the sawdust there was a clash as of metal. The methods of their backers were different—the negro, in one of the local coat-like shirts with a multiplicity of useless pockets and plaits, squatted on his heels, impassive, fateful, and African; but the man with the orthodox side whiskers became at once the victim of a hoarse whispering excitement. As the others' bird reeled drunkenly about—they were badly matched and the main no affair at all—his pallid face flushed, and he suggested new atrocities to his champion.

This, it seemed to me, was totally unnecessary, for a wickeder rooster, I was convinced, never lived. He was deliberate in his tactics, unwilling to be robbed of his pleasure by a chance *coup de grâce*, and confined himself to the beak. Soon his opponent leaned helplessly against the wall of the pit, while the victor methodically pecked him to death in small bloody pieces. The negro's face, couched on a charcoal black palm, was as immobile as green bronze; but the white was positively epileptic with triumph. And, when the defeated bird sank in a spoiled dead knot, he picked him up, and, with expressions of endearment, sucked clear its angry eyes. The preliminaries were again gone through with, and two large handsome roosters were confronted by each other. As the surging

clamour beat about them I saw that one was undecided in his opinion of what promised. He flapped his wings doubtfully; and then, as the other made a short rush forward, he turned and ran as fast as his shorn legs could carry him. This, considering the contracted round space of his course, was very fast indeed; the second, pursuing him with the utmost energy, was unable to get closer than a fleet dab at the stripped tail. It was a flight not without a desperate humour; but this, it was clear, was appreciated by no one besides me.

The execrations, the screams, that followed the retreating bird were beyond belief; the entire banked audience was swept by a passion that left some individuals speechlessly lifting impotent fists. Unaffected by this, the rooster slightly leaned toward the centre of gravity, went around and around the pit with an unflagging speed that should have commanded an independent admiration for itself. Occasionally the pursuer, in a feat of intelligence, cut directly across the sawdust, and a collision threatened . . . but it never quite arrived. I lost interest in the hurled curses, the hats twisted in excess of rage, in everything but the duration of the running rooster. It was remarkable; he had settled down to putting all he had of strength and reserve in his single purpose.

He had no will to fight, and, personally understanding and sympathizing with him completely,

I hoped his wish would be respected: while he had provided no main he had faithfully substituted a most unlooked-for and thrilling race, making for all time and nations and creeds of chicken a record for a thousand times around a cockpit. In some places he would, perhaps, have been released, returned to the eminence of a barnyard; but not in Cuba. When it had been thoroughly demonstrated that he was uncatchable by his rival, he was incontinently seized and both roosters were carried, panting and bald-eyed, to a subsidiary ring beyond, not half the size of the principal pit, where running, or any discretion, was an impossibility.

I saw him go with regret—he deserved a greater consideration; and I hoped that, metaphorically in a corner, he would turn and be victorious. A new individual, a small brown man in soiled linen, had entered the box, and he at once, in a slow, painful, but intelligible English, opened a conversation with me. He had, he said, a consuming admiration for Americans and—as an earnest of his goodwill—he proposed to let me in on what, in the North, would have been called a good thing. It was no less than the cautious information that in the next fight a dark chicken, a chicken carrying a betting end as long as the Prado, had been entered by President Menocal's brother. I could, with a wave of the hand, make a small fortune: for him-

self, he was unfortunate—he possessed but eleven dollars and odd pesetas.

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I made some non-committal remark and turned a shoulder on his friendliness for Americans, conscious of a distinct annoyance at having been mistaken for—well, a tourist. There was no inherent inferiority in that transient state of being; but it was a characteristic of the settlers of any given place—settlers of at least forty-eight hours—that they should regard with tolerant amusement the new and the uninformed. He did, I thought, my clothes, my cigar, my whole air of sophisticated comprehension, an injustice; he should have recognized that I was not an individual to accept readily public confidential information.

The birds were brought in and weighed, and the person in the box with me and the billowing white embroidery and carpet slippers excitedly indicated a lean cream-coloured rooster with brown points. I fancied the other more, and thought something of betting on him, when the main began—the brown bird of the brother of Menocal flashed forward, launched himself into the air with a clash, and drove both spurs through the head before him. It had occupied something more than five but less than ten seconds. Too bad, a deferential voice murmured in my ear, that I hadn't taken advantage

of such an excellent opportunity to get the better of all the too-wise ones. With but eleven dollars and some silver he had been cramped . . . My interest in cock-fighting faded before an annoyance that drove me away from the Puente de Agua Dulce, calculating how much, at the odds I missed, I'd have gained.

Money won at sheer gambling, at games of chance which involved no personal skill or effort, always seemed hardly short of miraculous to me—magical sums produced at the waving of a hand. Their possession gave me a disproportionate pleasure and glow of well-being; they seemed to be the mark of a special favour—the visible gesture, the approbation, of fortune and chance. I had had a lucky night at the Kursaal in Geneva, playing baccarat, and the changier, a silver chain about his neck, had reconverted my bowl of chips into heaped gold and treasury paper. But with the exception, and for some small amounts, I was unlucky. The occasion just past was an illustration—I was never really disastrously overtaken, but equally I never reached sensational heights.

There were, certainly, numerous places in Havana for roulette, and always the American Club for auction bridge and poker; but I found my way to none of these: there were men who could hear the soundless turn of a wheel, soundless but for the fillip of the pith ball on the wood and metal,

through the streets and walls of a city; and there were others who, merely pausing in an hotel or club corridor, would immediately form about them all the adjuncts of poker—the cards, the blue and yellow and white chips, the bank president, the shifty polite individual with pink silk sleeves and a rippling shuffle, the rich youth. . . . But—due, I suppose, to my spectacled benevolent appearance—such occasions let me pass unnotified.

I made, however, some effort to find a billiard academy, with the hope of seeing the professional games and their audiences, built up on the four sides of the tables, common to the Continent; but if there were any in Havana they too eluded me. I hoped to see bearded champions embrace each other after chalking their cues and then drive the ivory balls in red and white angles across the deep green or nurse them about the intersections of the balk lines. It was very different in America, where the billiard parlours were a part of hotel life, great rooms with the level green of the tables fogged in smoke through which the lights resembled the diminished moons of Saturn, the audience, entirely masculine, seated on the high chairs about the walls.

The types of women lingering outside, waiting patiently on convenient benches, were far different from the Latins. Occasionally a youth would put up his cue, dust the chalk from his fingers, assume

his accurately fitted coat, his soft brown hat, and go out to some girl with whom he would plunge into a subdued conversation with a note of expostulation. Strange youth and unpredictable girl! A term of endearment would escape, there'd be a quick clinging of hands; and, from an imitation gold purse, some money would be transferred to an engulfing pocket.

But the men of Havana, it seemed, were quite contented to talk, to sit in a café over refrescos, or in a parque with nothing at all but cigars, and discuss eternally, with a passionate interest, the details of their politics and city. Their contact with life at every point was vivid, and, in expression anyhow, forceful; they argued in a positive tone to which compromise, agreement, appeared hopelessly lost; and there was in the background the possibility of death by quarrelling. That, in itself, gave their whole bearing a difference from the conduct of a land where a drubbing with fists was the worst evil to be ordinarily expected. They looked with contempt on a blow, the retaliation of stevedores, and we regarded with disgust a concealed weapon. But where we might still, in simpler places, defend what was locally called purity with pistols, no one, to-day, took their politics seriously.

Politics, in the United States, was looked on with cynical indifference, where it was not a profession; but in Cuba it was invariably the cause of fiery

oratory and high tempers. This had been true of America; even in my own memory, in the Virginia highlands, shotguns had been out for a difference of principles; but patriotism of that stamp had fallen away before civilization, as it was optimistically termed, the end finally brought about by prohibition. Discussion in general, that rose in such volume on the Cuban night, had little part farther north; my own friends, the men specially, almost never said anything except as a direct statement; we never met to talk.

They had a particular, a concrete, interest in living, but no general. Further than that, there was almost no individuality of opinion; the subjects which made good conversation were definitely and arbitrarily settled, closed. To open them, to challenge public opinion, was not to invite argument but to send men away to the greater safety, the solidity, of the herd. A good story, the humour of the latrine, was a better key to respectability than an honest doubt. For those reasons, I wanted to join the arguments, the orations really, flooding the circles of green-painted iron chairs on the Havana plazas; and, solitary, I passed envying the ingenuous welding dissent.

I imagined myself suddenly and completely changed into a Cuban, slight and dark, in white linen, with my hat, a stiff English straw, carefully laid beside me on a ledge of the paving, smoking

a cigar of rough shape but excellent tobacco. Not rich, certainly, but securely placed in life! I was, in fancy, the proprietor of a small yet thoroughly responsible oculist's establishment on Neptuno Street. Since I was no longer young, and a member of organized society, with a patron or two from the Prado, I was conservative, but little heated by patriotism, and in favour, rather than not, of annexation to the United States. My private view was that Cuba hadn't been conspicuously worse off under Spain than liberated. The politics of the present, when office-seekers descended to the nanigos . . . Here was the substance of violent argument and recriminations; the voices, the ideals, of young men beat on me in a high indignant storm; the names of Cuban patriots, martyred students, and Spanish butchers were shouted in my ears. Sacred blood flowed again in retrospect, and which should never be allowed to sink infertile; but when the words Free Cuba were pronounced I waved my cigar with hopeless derision.

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How significant it was, I thought, that, in imagination, I had pictured myself at fifty. I saw the Havana oculist clearly; his name, by all means, was Rogelio, Rogelio Mola; and he had a heavy grey moustache across his lean brown face which

gave him an air of gravity that largely masked the humour, the satire, in his quick black eyes—Spanish eyes with no perceptible trace of the soft iris of Africa. It was past one o'clock when his testulia scattered, and I accompanied him toward his home —walking to get rid of the stiffness of long sitting— over Dragones Street, in the direction of Vedado. Not yet, never now, would he have a house in Vedado itself; that was reserved for the bankers, planters, and Americans; but he was nicely situated in a new white dwelling of the approved style, overlooking a common that in turn commanded the sea.

The approved style was white plaster, a story and a half high, with an impressive portico, a portico, attached to a small private residence, that would have done honour to a capitol building. There was but little ground, principally extended in a lawn across the front, and banked, against the house, with the spotted leaves of croton plants, purple climbing Fausto, and Mar-Pacifico flowers deeply crimson. He had, it was plain from his walk, a touch of rheumatism, of sciatica really, and he halted in the Plaza de Dragones to press his thin hand to a leg and curse, by the Sacred Lady of Caridad, the old age overtaking him.

That, it seemed to me, would not carry his mind toward his dwelling, his wife grown inordinately fat, and their three daughters, all long ago asleep;

no, it would send his thoughts backward, over the way he had come, not from the Parque Central, but from youth. He would brush his moustache reminiscently, I was confident, at a train of gallant memories, chiefly of New York, where, on the pier of a fruit-importing house, he had spent some tremendous months. That experience had given him an advantage, an authority, in everything that touched the great republic, and lent his politics an additional sagacity, his cynicism an edge difficult to turn. He had intended to stay in America, a journey to Havana was to have been but a temporary affair; but there he had attached himself to a wife, the daughter of a grinder of lenses . . . and here he was at fifty, going back, after listening to a lot of nonsense in the Parque, to his family, in the general direction, too, of the cemetery.

It was sad, and, for a moment, there was a debate, a conflict, in his mind: while his age was beyond denial, and his hip troubled him—but only after he spent an evening on the cold iron chair of a plaza—he showed no signs of having passed the middle of his life. The grey hair was distinguished —Madame Nazabal, who was a Frenchwoman, had assured him of that. The handsome girl in El Corazón de Jesus, the Vedado bakery where English was spoken, flushed when their hands accidentally met over the counter. . . . But this mood, his courage, was fictitious; it sank and

left him limping palpably, with an oppressed heart. He was, simply, an old fool, he told himself, vindicating the humorous comprehension of his gaze.

If he wasn't careful the young men of his establishment, over whom he kept a strict parent-like discipline, would laugh at him behind his back. They were inclined to be wild as it was, and he suspected them of going to the carnival balls, the danzons, in the opera house. God knew that he had seen them in the company of no better than the girls from the cigar factories. When he was younger—young—that dangerous company had given a dance on the last Thursday of every month, except when it fell in Lent, and he had held his pace there with the most agile among them, once even pressing an argument with a man who was reputed to have been an espada of Castile. A knife had grazed his throat, and slit the left shoulder of his coat through to the skin; the mark remained, a livid welt under his collar, but the assailant had vanished before he could kill him. All memory of the girl had gone; but she was beautiful, he was certain of that, or else why should he have noticed her?

The girls of those days had a — a quality, a manner, lacking in the present. Their hearts had been warmer, they were less mercenary. Rogelio Mola detested mercenary women. Now, as far as he could make out, nothing was possible but

rounds of the expensive cafés; the fact was the girls only wanted to be taken to the Dos Hermanos, or the Little Club, where the Americans could see them, and, perhaps. . . . Then, in about 1880, there was some fidelity, some honour, some generosity. There was romance—that had disappeared more utterly than anything else: he was more than a little vague in meaning; his romance was an indefinite state—the glow, in reality, of his own youth.

At that time, in such discussions as had passed this evening, he had been on the side of revolution, of expeditions to the Trocha, secret associations; but simply because his blood was hot, his age appropriate for revolt. He had been, without doubt, difficult; his elders had predicted a cell in Cabañas as an anteroom, a sort of immediate purgatory, to hell. He raised expressive shoulders slightly at the thought of the holy legends; a business for women and priests. The Church, temporarily, had had some rare pasturage; but the Fathers were a shade too greedy: they had gobbled up so much that it was necessary to drive them out. Women and priests, priests and women! The latter had suffered no diminution of their privileges; they had too much for which the young men, for all their self-opinion, got nothing, or next to nothing, in return. Rogelio Mola wondered if the old houses of pleasure were unchanged.

He had not thought of them for years, and he was contemptuous of men of his age who did, still, consider them. Not that he was puritanical and condemned all such institutions, though he had a strong suspicion that they had deteriorated. For the youth of his day, they had been very largely places of meeting and conspiracy, where traditionally the sentiment supported attacks on authority. Yet a girl from Lima had betrayed Marío Turafa, his friend, in hiding, to the Spanish Government. It was said that Marío had been deported, perhaps to the very Peru from which came his Delilah, but it was more probable that he had been shot. There had been one whom he, Rogelio, had liked. . . . Her name came back to him, Ana, and the fact that she sang quite beautifully . . . nothing else. The words of a song formed from the melody for a moment audible among his memories:

> Clavales, clavales
> de mi Andalucía!
> Mujeres, mujeres
> de la Patria mia!

It was evident from this that she had come from Andalusia. Thirty years ago! He wished her the best of luck. Hadn't they been young together, with at least the innocence of true affection? His thoughts turned guiltily to his wife, to his daughters white like flowers of the Copa de Nieva.

The twinge in his leg resembled a hot wire; and resolutely he marshalled his attention forward. How dark, how depressing, certain reaches of Havana were, and he pictured the cemetery ghostly, icy, in the night; women, with their confessional, their faith in the forgiveness of sins, were fortunate. Yet no one must say of him that he was a coward, that, at the last, he had been borne into oblivion on the oil of the priests he had disregarded in life. Deep under his scepticism, however, a low inextinguishable hereditary flame of hope burned independent of his intelligence.

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My mind returned once more to Rogelio Mola as I was standing outside an iron-bound door, waiting for admittance, not far from the Arsenal. It was the entrance to what he had called a house of pleasure, and, long established in Havana, unknown to America, one that he might easily have frequented in the reprehensible period of youth. I had adequate abstract reasons for my presence, but Rogelio, correctly insistent on a saving generosity of emotion, had needed no ponderous explanation. Indeed, I was there in his interest, since, after all, I had imagined him: I wanted very much to have completely the material of his setting, of the surrounding from which his friend, betrayed by the Peru that had, centuries

before, despoiled Cuba, had been led out to be, doubtless, shot. Not that, pressingly, I felt the need for an excuse, or that I was essentially making a descent. The very bitterness, the revilement in solemn terms, of my early instructions, had, reacting, defeated itself.

What was before me, in a world where the pure and the impure were inexplicably mixed in one flesh, was inevitable; its ugliness lay not with it, but in a society which, constantly tearing it down, as constantly projected again the penalty, the shadow, of a perfunctory and material estate. In addition, as long as the age of marriage, of love, was so tragically different in society and in nature, an informal interlude was unavoidable. But I had no need to apologize for anything. I had been spared the dreary and impertinent duty of improving the world; the whole discharge of my responsibility was contained in the imperative obligation to see with relative truth, to put down the colours and scents and emotions of existence. What, pretentiously, was called the moral must shift for itself; that depended on what, beneath consciousness, I was, the justice and sympathy, the comprehension, of my being.

A slide opened mysteriously on the blank darkness before me, a bolt was drawn; and immediately I had left the street for a little entresol filled with lamplight, the breath of scented powder, and the

notes of a piano played by a girl whose cigarette burned furiously on the scarred ebonized top of the instrument. She half turned, scanning me indifferently, and went on with her unelaborate music. The woman who had admitted me, a figure whose instant scrutiny resembled the unsparing accuracy of a photograph by flashlight, after a polite greeting, ignored me absolutely, and I was left to follow my fancy.

This led to the patio, larger and more entrancing than any I had before seen; it was paved in blocks of marble, and the white walls, warmly and fully illuminated, made a sharp contrast with the night, the sky and stars, above. There was a tree growing at one side; what it was I didn't know, but it hung large intensely green leaves into the light before climbing to obscurity. A great many people, it seemed to me, were present; and, as I found a seat on an ornamental iron bench, the formality of a civil greeting was scrupulously observed. The company was, to every outer regard, decorous to the point of stiffness. Opposite, two officers of the Spanish Navy, in immaculate white with gilt epaulettes, were drinking naranjadas and conversing with two girls nodding in appropriate sympathy. Farther on a Cuban exquisite, his hands, in spite of the heat, cased in lavender-grey gloves, was staring fixedly at the shining toes of his shoes. Others—yes, Rogelio in his youth—

their hair faultlessly glossy, were more animated; their gestures and voices rose irrepressibly and sank in confidences to ears close beside them.

A row of doors, I then saw, filled one side of the patio, the interiors closed by swinging slatted screens; the wall at my back was blank, an exit at the rear, while on the right was the entrance. Scattered about, with the benches and chairs, small tables held a variety of glasses and drinks . . . the entire atmosphere was pervaded, characterized, by utter ease. That was, to me, the most notable of the effects of that enclosure—an amazing freedom from superficial obligations, from the burdensome conventions which, so large a part of existence, had come to be accepted either subconsciously, or as a necessary evil. I realized for the first time the inanity of imposed pretences, the thick, the suffocating armour of triviality that criminally and ludicrously muffled life.

There were present, of course, all the poses of humanity, and a great many of its conventions; the girls were not hippogriffs, but girls—timid, bold, religious, sceptical, feminine, sentimental, happy and unhappy, hopeful and hopeless. Yet, in contradiction to this, the air offered a complete release from a thousand small irritating pressures. It came, partly, from the sense that here I was outside the order, the legality, the explicit purpose, of the forces organizing the world. I had stepped,

as it were, from time, immediacy, to timelessness. The patio into which I was shut might have been on that earth the ancients conceived of as round and flat as a plate. No discovery, no wisdom accumulated by centuries and supreme sacrifice, had any bearing, any importance, in my circumstances now. I was contemporaneous with the lives precariously spent between the ebb and flood of the ice ages. The animals knew as much. But if I had nothing to gain from all that was successively admirable, nothing was lost that had been implicit in the beginning, nothing at the last end would be changed.

The conversation fluctuated about me, the glasses were carried away and brought back refilled; the smoke of cigars and cigarettes floated tranquilly up, and was lost above the illumination, and I completely dropped the embarrassment which came from an uncertainty in such minor customs as existed. I was, in fact, extremely comfortable when I understood that I was left entirely to my own desires. These included the offer, in clumsy Spanish, of a general odour of drinks; and there was a revival of polite phrases. Not all, by a half, accepted; the others bowed, gravely or cheerfully; and I retired again to my speculations.

These were mainly centred about the regret that the scene before me was practically forbidden to American novels. It had, in reality, no place

in the United States, and, therefore, could claim no legitimate page in American literature. There, anyhow, it could be said for public morals, such things were nearly all that the word "vice" implied. What, exactly, I was lamenting was the old fundamental lack of candour in the American attitude. This, beyond question, proceeded from the people themselves, and not from commissions; an enormous majority, except for that national whispered currency of obscenity, was prudish beyond reclamation. For them, it was probable, the innocence of the body had been branded eternally. And I was neither a martyr nor a reformer. The loss to me was considerable—as it was, dealing with only the outer garments of fact, I had been accused of lasciviousness or something of the kind—and I envied the French the cool logic of their mentality, the cultivation of the French audience.

My mind reverted to Jurgen, the remarkable narrative of James Cabell's, that had been suppressed; a summary act disturbing irony. For Mr. Cabell had spent a life, practically, drawn from the imagination of childhood to the performance of maturity, in a mental preoccupation of disembodied purity. He had set up, in his heart and in his books, the high altar of an image of desire, never to be clasped, reached, from earth; a consolation, really, for the earth-bound. But

that, in the mind, the characteristic mind, of America, had not had the weight, the value, of a dandelion's gossamer seed. It was, definitely, a land that cared nothing for literature, the casting of transient life into the permanence of beautiful form. As the world advanced, in years, the general importance of literature, it seemed to me, diminished; the truth was that people didn't care for it.

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The ladies of pleasure—the merest identifying phrase, since, in the first place, they were practically all in the years of immaturity—were dressed in evening satins, cut generally with an effective simplicity, or the lacy whiteness, still better adapted to the young person. In the tropical patio, with its canopy of broad green leaves and night, the marble pavement and alabaster walls, they were brilliantly effective; it was only after an extended regard, carefully casual, that I appreciated the amazing diversity of their individuality, the gamut of bloods run. There were no Anglo-Saxons, they were faithful to the traditions of their latitude; and there was no positive Africa; but there was Africa in faint dilutions, in attenuations traced from lands remote as Tartary.

There was, for example, a girl so blanched that I saw she wasn't white at all; her face, even without its drenching of powder, was the colour of the rice-

paper cigarette she smoked walking indolently by, while her hair was a blazing mass of undyed red. Her features, her nose, and the pinched blue corners of her eyes, the crinkling tendency of her piled hair—its authenticity unmistakable in a strong vivid sheen—showed the secret that lay back of her exotic appalling splendour. Her progress across the patio was a slender undulation, and her gaze was fixed, her attention lost, in an abstraction to which there was no key. No imagination could have pictured such a striking figure nor placed her so exactly in the ultimate setting.

Here she was artificial—there were long jet earrings against her neck—and savage. In her silk stocking, I had every reason to suspect, there was a knife's thin steel leaf; but who could predict the emotions—no, instincts—to which it was servant? Who, trivial with the trivialities of to-day, could foretell, trifling with her, what incentive would drive the steel deep up under his arm? Hers would be a dreadful face to see, in its flaming corona, in the last agonizing wrench of consciousness.

Seated and talking earnestly to a Cuban with worried eyes, was a small round brown girl in candy green, whose feet in childish kid slippers, and soft hands, bore an expression of flawless innocence. Clasped above an elbow was an enamelled gold band, such as youth no longer wore, with a hinge

and fine gold chain securing the lock. She touched it once, absent-mindedly, and I wondered what was its potency of association, when, at a turn of her wrist, she drained a glass of brandy, an act of revealing incongruity. She was, I recognized from her speech, Spanish, from the Peninsula; and another, who told me that her city was Bilbao, dispassionately, for a little, occupied my bench. Bilbao, she explained, was not beautiful . . . a place of industry and money. Nor was she charming, she was too harsh; but her personality had an unmistakable national flavour, like that of Castell de Remey wine. I was relieved when she rose abruptly, and disappeared into the entresol, where the piano was still being intermittently played.

The screen door to a room swung open and a large rosy creature, negligent and sleepy, appeared momentarily, gazing with a yawn, a flash of faultless teeth, over the assemblage. She was without a dress, but her hair was intricately up, and a froth of underclothes with knots of canary-yellow ribbons and yellow clocked stockings made a surprising foreground for the painfully realistic Crucifixion hanging on the wall within. The cross was ebony and the figure in a silver-like metal, the Passion portrayed by a gaunt rigidity of suffering. The screen closed on the tableau of contrast, and the patio resumed its appearance of a vaguely distorted formal occasion.

Whatever my feelings would have been, there was no doubt that—if for the extreme pictorial quality alone—my interest was highly engaged. My interest, and not my indignations! I was not, it must be admitted, commendably outraged, or filled with the impulse to rescue, to save, anyone, however young. I seriously questioned my ability to offer salvation, since I lacked the distinctly sustaining conviction of superiority; I couldn't, off-hand, guarantee anything. Suppose, for argument, I took one—the youngest—and haled her away from her deplorable situation: what was open to her, to us? Would she have preferred, stayed for an hour, in any of the tepid conventional Magdalen homes, if there were such establishments in Havana?

I had a vision of appearing with her wrapped in a frivolous cloak, before the experienced wisdom of the Inglaterra manager, in the corridor of American salesmen, among the wives of the vice-presidents of steamship companies, and explaining that I was delivering my companion from the wages of death. I should have been, and very properly, put under restraint and Dr. Lainé hurriedly summoned. In all probability, and with the utmost discretion, they'd have sent Pilar, or Manuelita, back to the patio with the doors, explaining to her that I was demented.

There were, undoubtedly, better places for girls

of fifteen, and they would have been the first to choose them, if a choice had been possible—some would have been wives and some opera singers, and all, with wishing so free, uncommonly beautiful. I had an idea that a number of them would have gone farther than the latter, and, as well they might, left the rest to chance. But their ideas must have been stupid compared to what they actually possessed.

There was a girl with a trace of Chinese in the flattened oval of her countenance and heavy black hair, as severe as a metal casing, redolent with fascination. She sat withdrawn from the others, with her hands clasped in the lap of a fine white dress. She was delicate, but not thin, though her neck was so slender that the weight of her head seemed bent a little forward. I had never before seen skin so faintly and evenly golden; there wasn't a flush, a differently shaded surface, anywhere visible. A sultry air hung about her mouth, the under lip brushed with carmine. Her eyes, lowered and almost shut, were large, and their lids were as smooth as ivory. But she wasn't, otherwise, suggestive of that; she more nearly resembled the magic glow of an apple of Hesperides.

If I had encountered her twenty years earlier, my experience would have been richer by a glimpse of her involved image-like charm. She was, conceivably, to the superficial West, dull: it was

evident that she almost never talked—the girls about were not her friends—but she had qualities, aspects, infinitely preferable to a flow of words. I should have asked of her hardly more than, at present, she was, sitting quite a distance from me and fundamentally unaware of my existence. I debated whether she would be more attractive in the sleeve coat and jade pins of China, or in her virginal white muslin. . . . That now was the circumference of my duty toward her—to put her in such colours, such surroundings, as would infinitely multiply her mystery.

It was, I realized, time for me to leave; I wasn't Rogelio Mola in his youth; and I paid the inconsequential price of the drinks I had ordered. There were adieux, as civil and impersonal as my welcome, and the door to the street was opened to let me, together with a breath of the scented powder, out. The arcade before me sounded for a moment with the smooth falling of a latch, and then all trace of the near presence of so much lightness was obliterated. In memory it seemed slightly unreal, a dangerous fantasy of murmurs and subdued, knife-like passions—the bleached soul of Africa with massed red hair; a frivolity of yellow ribbons against a silver tormented Christ; the inertia of the East in a heavy-eyed child; but, to balance this, I remembered the girl, like a harsh native wine, from Bilbao, an industrial city and

very rich; she restored to the scene its ordinary sordid reality.

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The high, empty austerity of my room enveloped me in a happy tranquillity; its effect was exactly that of increasing age, substituting for the violent contrasts of life an impersonal, spacious whiteness. I very placidly prepared for the cool, fresh linen of my bed, my mind filled with cool, fresh thoughts. More definitely than ever before I was accepting and accommodating myself to the passage of time. I was not only reconciled to having left forty for ever behind, but I welcomed a release from the earlier struggles of resentment and desire. The joys of youth, or anyhow in my case, had been out of proportion to their penalties; I had failed at school, at the academies of art, and, more conspicuously still, as a citizen. I was even incapable of supporting myself, a task so easy that it was successfully performed by three-quarters of the fools on earth.

The failure as a painter was serious, but I had never had the least interest in those qualities included in the term "a good citizen." I knew nothing about the government of the United States, and made no effort to find out; as an abstraction it had reality for me, but as a reality, no substance. The priceless right of vote I neglected for whom-

ever it was in the Republican machine that regularly discharged that responsibility for me. . . . All that interested me, that I deeply cared for, was first the disposal of paint on stretched canvas, and then the arrangement of words with a probable meaning and possible beauty.

An extremely bad period, that, when I tried to write without knowledge or support, reaching from twenty until well after thirty, when I managed to sell a scrap of prose. From then until forty the time had gone in a flash, a scratching of the pen; it seemed incredible that the seven books on a shelf bearing my name had been the result of so brief, so immaterial, a time. Now, stranger still, I was in Cuba, gazing peacefully into the dim, expensive space of a room in the Hotel Inglaterra, congratulating myself on the loss, the positive lapse, of what was called men's most valuable possession.

No better place for the trying of my sincerity than Havana existed; no other city in the world could so perfectly create the illusion of complete irresponsibility, of happiness followed for its own sake, as an end, or as the means of forgetfulness. Its gala walls and plazas and promenades, its alternating sparkle and languor, like flags whipping in the wind or drooping about their staffs, always conveyed a spirit of holiday, and of a whole absence of splenetic censure. At the bottom of this the

climate, eternally sunny, with close vivid days and nights stirring with a breeze through the galleries, concentrated the mind and body on pleasure.

Night had always been the time for gaiety, when the practical was veiled in shade; and Havana responded with an inimitable grace to the stars. It was constructed for night, like a lunar park of marble and palms and open flooding radiance; with, against that, streets packed with darkness and doors of mystery to which clung the faint breath of patchouli. The air was instinct with seduction, faintly touched by the pungency of Ron Bacardi and limes, and bland with the vapours of delightful cigars. The clothes, too, the white linens and flannels and silks of the men; the ruffled dresses on the balconies, the flowery laces, like white carnations, in the automobiles; the wide hats of Paris and the satin slippers, tied about the ankles, with preposterous heels, the fluttering fans—all, all were in the key of light, sharp emotion, of challenge and invitation and surrender.

Yes, any strictness of conduct in Havana, any philosophy in the face of that charm, was unaffected beyond dispute. I had been, in a further development of this, tacitly left to my own devices and thoughts, as if there were a general perception of my remoteness from the affair in hand. I was suffered to come and go without notice; no one, much, spoke to me; even those not unaware of

the possibility of a book, of San Cristóbal de la Habana, in which their city would find praise, were hardly stirred to interest. The moment to go to Havana was youth, the moment for masked balls and infidelity and champagne; its potency for me lay in its investment of memories; I regarded it as a spectacle set in the tropics. I was an onlooker and not a participant. But I had, as I have shown, no regret; I had become reconciled not only to the fleetness of time, but equally to the fact that my rôle was necessarily a spectator's. Hour after hour, year after year, I sat writing at the low window which looked out over my green terrace and clipped hedge, to the road, to life, beyond.

Above everything, then, I was satisfied with the Havana I knew. From the standpoint of actuality my comprehension was limited, I was familiar with only a certain narrow part of the city, for it was my habit to go back to what I had found rather than discover the new, perhaps ten streets and a handful of houses, parks, and cafés. Too much to get into a score of books. What I had lost, I thought further, if, indeed, I had ever possessed it, was a warm, personal contact such as I should have had dancing with a lovely girl. I never danced, but remained outside, philosophically, gazing at the long, bright whirling rectangles.

At the Inglaterra there were many men older

than myself, who danced persistently and had the warmest sorts of contacts; they too, wore flowers in their coats, but aggressive, and not reminiscent blooms. They formed most of the element of foreign gaiety; there wasn't much youth among them, but I didn't envy them in the slightest. They were, if possible, more absurd than the women unmindful of thickening waists and dulled eyes. Their ardour was febrile, and their power money; and every time they escorted, with a quickened step, their charmers past young, dark men, the charmers glanced back appealingly. It was different with the Cubans, who regarded such things more naturally, and did not, practically, in consequence, get drunk.

The noise from San Rafael Street never slackened, the clamour of the mule-drivers and the emptying cans of refuse took the place of the motor signals; the slats of my lowered shutters showed streaks of dawn. I turned once, it appeared, and the room was filled with indirect sunlight; the hands of my watch were at ten. It was eleven before I was dressed, with the morning cup of black coffee empty on a table; at twelve I had breakfast, and until five I idly read. The evening as well was idle; a thoroughly wasted day, judged by obvious and active standards. I thought, with no impulse to return, of the house near the Arsenal, which had, in effect, been open for centuries and which, unless

life were purified, would never close. The purity I meant was not a limitation of passion but its release from obscene confines. It didn't matter what I meant and, again, I was becoming too serious . . . or not serious about the correct things. There was perpetually the danger of being overtaken, in spite of my impetuous early flight, by the influences, the promptings, of my heredity and strong, first associations. What an amazing climax to my records of chiffon textures and moods of chiffon that would be: shouting the creed of a bitter Scots induration from the informal pulpits of the streets! Or I might publish, to the dismay of everyone intimately concerned, a denunciatory sermonizing book. But what the subject was wouldn't matter, as it had not mattered with Jeremy Taylor, if it were written with sufficient beauty. Disagreeable books, too, in spite of the accepted contrary belief, were always very highly esteemed.

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It was easy enough to account for Jeremy Taylor by the vague generalization of beauty, and I forced myself to a closer scrutiny of that term and my meaning. The words beauty and love, and a dozen others, like old shoes, had grown so shapeless through long miswear that they would stay on no foot. I tried to isolate some quality indisputably

recognizable as beautiful and hit, to my surprise, on intellectual courage. The thought of an undeviating mental integrity was as exhilarating as the crash of massed marching bands. Then, searching for another example, I recalled August nights at Dower House, with the moonlight lying like water between the black shadows of the trees on the lawn. There was a harsh interwoven shrilling of locusts, and the echo—almost the feel rather than the sound—of thunder below the horizon. This, too, stirred me profoundly, brought about the glow transmutable into creative effort.

Another excursion found nothing but a boy and a girl, any boy and any girl, fired by shy uncomplicated passion. . . . A mental, a visual, and a natural incentive, each with the same effect, the identical pinching of the heart, and thrust to a common hidden centre. What had they each alike? Perhaps it was this: that they were the three great facts of existence, the primary earth, the act of creation, and the crowning dignity, the superiority of men who, somehow, had transvalued the sum of their awarded clay. Somehow! I had no intention of examining that. The fact was, for me, enough.

There was, however, another phase of beauty still, one peculiarly the property of novelists, and which had to do, not with life at all, but with death, with vain longing and memories and failure. All

the novels which seemed to me of the first rank were constructed from these latter qualities; and while painting and music and lyrical poetry were affirmative, the novel was negative, built, where it was great, from great indignations. Yet, while this was obvious truth, it failed to include or satisfy me; for there were many passages not recognizable as great in the broadest sense, both in literature and life, that filled me with supreme pleasure—there were pages of Turgenev spun out of the fragile melancholy of a girl, a girl with a soul in dusk, far more enthralling than, for example, Thomas Hardy. It may have been that there was the perception of a similitude between Turgenev's figure and myself; certainly I was closer to her mood, her disease of modernity, than to a sheep-herder; and there was a possibility, for my own support, that the finest drawn sensibilities, not regarded as emotions in the grand key, would turn out to be our most highly justified preoccupation.

I was, at present, in Havana, submerged in its fascination, and when I came to write about it there would not be lacking those to say that I had been better occupied with simpler things. Hugh Walpole had warned me of the danger, to me, of parquetry and vermilion Chinese chippendale; and I was certain that he would speak to me again in the same tone about idling in a mid-Victorian Pompeii, celebrating drink and marble touched by

the gilder's brush of late afternoon. Perhaps Walpole, together with Harry Mencken's keen, friendly discernment, was right; but, damn it, I didn't know such essential simplicities as shepherds, I was dangerously ignorant of current reality; and I doubted if my style was a suitable instrument for rugged facts.

What remained for me, an accomplishment spacious enough for anyone, was the effort to realize that sharp sense of beauty which came from a firm delicate consciousness of certain high pretensions, valours, maintained in the face of imminent destruction. And in that category none was sharper than the charm of a woman, so soon to perish, in a vanity of array as momentary and iridescent as a may-fly. The thought of such a woman, the essence, the distillation, of an art of life superimposed on sheer economy, was more moving to me than the most heroic maternity. I couldn't get it into my head that loveliness, which had a trick of staying in the mind at points of death when all service was forgotten, was rightly considered to be of less importance than the sweat of some kitchen drudge.

The setting of a woman in a dress by Cheruit, a part of the bravery of fragile soft paste Lowestoft china and square emeralds that would feed a starving village on fingers that had done no more than wave a fan, the fan itself, on gold and ivory

with tasselled silk—the things to which the longing of men, elevated a degree above hard circumstances, turned—were of equal weight with the whole; for it was not what the woman had in common with a rabbit that was important, but her difference. On one hand, that difference was moral, but on the other, æsthetic; and I had been absorbed by the latter.

This, however wide apart it may seem, was closely bound to my presence in Havana, to my delight and purpose there. It was nothing more than a statement, a development, if not a final vindication, of my instant sense of pleasure and familiarity—a place already alive in my imagination; while my special difficulty was the casting of it into a recognizable, adequate medium. There, in the plaiting of cobwebs instead of hemp rope, I particularly invited disaster. It wasn't necessary that I should sustain anyone, but only spread the illusion of the buried associations and image of a brain. That, if it were true, I held, would be beauty.

Here, at least, I was serious about the correct things, direct rather than conventional; all that mattered was the spreading of the illusion, the spectacle of what part of Havana I did know interpreted, realized, not in the spirit of an architectural plan, but as sentient with reflected emotions. Otherwise, the most weighty charges against me were absolutely justified. If I couldn't make

Havana respond in the key of my intrinsic feelings, if I had no authentic feeling with which to invest it, my book, almost all my books, was a weariness and a mistake.

Novels of indignation or of melancholy—of a longing for the continuity of individual passion confronted with the inevitable; it was that, the perishability of all that was desirable, which gave to small things, a flower in the hair, their importance as symbols. The love story, once the exclusive province of fiction, had disappeared; it was now practically impossible for the slightest talent to fill a book in that manner. The romantic figment, like a confection of spun sugar with a sprig of artificial orange blossom, had been discarded; the beauty of love, it had been discovered, wasn't the possession of a particular heart, but the tenderness, the pity, that came from the realization of its inescapable loss. No man could love a woman, no woman could love a man, who was to live for ever—a thousand years would be an insuperable burden. The higher a cultivation, a delight, reached, the more tragic was its breaking by death; the greater knowledge a mind held, the more humiliating was the illimitable ignorance, the profound night pressing in upon every feeble and temporary human lamp.

Yes, the novels, the books I wanted to write, were composed, now, not so much from among the brasses, the tympani, as of the violins. The great

majority, like the great books, were dedicated to the primary chords; but my reaching the former had been always hopeless. I didn't mind this, for I told myself that, while the structure of approbation I had gathered was comparatively modest, its stones and masonry were admirable; it was, if not a mansion, a gratifying cottage firmly set on earth, what was in England called, I believe, a freehold. It was mine, and there was no lease dependent on the good-will—or on my subserviency—of any landlord.

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Most of this went through my mind as I sat looking at my trunk, open on end in an alcove near the door, for I was gathering my clothes and thoughts in preparation for leaving Havana. One thing only that I wished to see now remained—the danzon at the National Theatre. I kept out a dark suit, one that would be inconspicuous in a lower spectator's box; for I had been told that it was desirable to avoid unnecessary attention. There was, briefly, an element of danger. This I doubted—I had heard the same thing so often before without subsequent justification—but I could believe it possible if there was any violent discharge of primitive emotion. Here the spirit of Africa burned remote and pale, but it was still a tropical incomprehensible flame.

A strip of red carpet led from the outer steps, across a large promenade, to the circular wall of the theatre; and though it was past eleven, the ball hadn't yet assumed an appearance of life. But just within the entrance a negro band began suddenly to play, and in the music alone I immediately found the potent actuality of danger. I was without the knowledge necessary to the disentangling of its elements; there were fiddles and horns, and unnatural kettle-drums, and an instrument made from a long gourd, with a parallel scoring for the scrape of a stick. The music was first a shock, then an exasperation hardly to be borne, but finally it assumed a rhythm maddening beyond measure.

It was Africa and something else—notes taken from the Moors, splitting quavers of Iberian traditions, shakes and cadences that might have been the agonized voice of the first Cubeños; with an unspeakable distortion, a crazy adaptation, of scraps of to-day. There was no pause, no beginning or end, in its form; it went on and on and on, rising and falling, fluctuating, now in a harsh droning and then a blasting discord—the savage, naked utterance of a naked, savage lust; it was a music, not of passion, but of the frenzy of rape. Nothing like it would have been possible in writing, allowed in painting; only music was free to express, to sound, such depths. Nothing but music could

have conveyed the inarticulate cries of the stirred mire that flooded the marble space of the opera house. It had lost the simplicity of its appropriate years, the spring orgies in the clearings of early forests; time had made it hideously menacing, cynical, and corrupt.

At an aisle to the boxes within a negro woman, with a wheedling tainted manner, tried to sell me a nosegay; and two others, younger and pale, their faces coated with rice powder, went past in dragging satins. They were chattering a rapid Spanish, and their whitened cheeks and dead-looking, mat-like hair, their coffee-coloured breasts and white kid gloves, gave them an extraordinary incongruity; while behind them, as sharp as the whisper of their skirts, a stinging perfume lingered. Leaning forward on the rail of my enclosure I gazed down over the floored expanse of the auditorium.

The stage was set with the backdrop and wings of a conventional operatic design—a scene that would have served equally Aïda or La Favorita; it towered, like a faded dream of pseudo-classic Havana, into the theatrical heavens, expanses of bistre and sepias and charcoal-grey, of loggias and peristyles and fountains; while, in close order about its three sides, were ranged stiff chairs in a vivid live border of dancers. They were of every colour from absolute pallor, the opacity of plaster, to utter blackness. The men, for the most part, were light,

some purely Spanish, the negritos, at least to me, conspicuous; but I could see no indisputably white women. There was a girl in a mantone of bright, contrasting colours, a high comb and rose in her hair, about whom there was a question. However, her partner was one of the few full negroes there; and, as they revolved below my box, it seemed that her skin had a leaden cast.

The danzon itself had, at first, the appearance of a sustained gravity; it was danced slowly, in very small space, following the music with arbitrary reverses, and pausing. There might have been, to the superficial view, a restraint almost approaching dignity had the dancers been other. The men, without exception, wore their stiff straw hats, and smoked cigars through every evolution; while the dresses, the dressing, of the women were fantastic: a small, wasted girl, dryly black, had copied the colour and petals of a sunflower. As she revolved her skirt flared out from legs like bent bones, and a hat of raw yellow flapped across her grotesque, ebony countenance.

The danzon, for a moment, in spite of the music played continuously and alternately by two orchestras occupying a box on either side of the stage, seemed formal. Then, abruptly, a couple lost every restraint, and their maddened spinning and furious hips tore the illusion to shreds. And slowly I began to be conscious of a poisonous air, a

fetid air as palpable as the odours and scents—the breath, the premonition, of the danger of which I had been warned. It lay in an ugly hysteria of rasped emotions that at any illogical accident might burst into the shrillness of a knife. It wasn't dangerous so much as it was abjectly wicked, the deliberate calling up of sooty shapes that had better be kept buried. It was unimportant that the men below me were, in the daytime, commonplace clerks, the women could be anything chance had made them; here, to the spoiled magic of Carabalie nights, they were evoking a ceremonial of horror.

Personally, since I had no hopes to save nor plans to protect, I hadn't the desire, like Samson, to pull down the pillars of the roof on their debased heads. I enjoyed it remarkably; the more because I saw, scattered among the crowd, figures of unreal and detrimental beauty—a creamy magnificence in creamy satin with a silver band on her forehead; a yellow creature with oblique eyes in twenty white flounces and a natural garland of purple flowers; a thing of ink, of basalt carved by an opulent chisel, on whose body clothes were incidental; and corrupt graces, perfect in youth and figure, weaving the patterns, the wisdom, of Sodom.

One o'clock passed, then two and three, but there was no abatement in the danzon. A middle-aged man, with an abstracted air, danced without

stopping for an hour and fifty minutes. His partner, flushing through her dark skin, was expensively habited: her fingers and throat glittered coldly with diamonds, and her hat was swept with long, dipping plumes. She had a malignant mouth, and eyes a thick, muddy brown, and it was clear that she hated the man in whose arms she was turning. I wondered about her hatred, and the patience, the indifference, of the other; how revolting she would be in a few hours, livid and ghastly in the morning. He, probably, would then be standing at a high desk, counting dollars with integrity, or adding columns of figures, precise and respectable in an alpaca coat. An older man still was dancing by himself, intent on the intricate stepping of his own feet. His agility soon won an admiring circle, and his violence increased with the applause; he jumped in the air, clapping his heels together, and his arms waved wildly—a marionette pulled convulsively by wires in strange, merciless hands.

I imagined a fetish, a large god, on the stage, drooping over his swollen belly, with a hanging lip, and hands set in his loins. His legs were folded, lost in flesh . . . a squatting, smeared trunk of hideous service. Around him were the seated rows of worshippers, on either hand was his jangling praise, and before him revolved the dancers in his rite. The music throbbed in my brain like a mad-

ness that would have dragged me down to the floor. I speculated fleetly over such a surrender, the drop, through countless ages, of that possible descent.

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It was, however, only just to add that the idol of Guinea suffered unduly from his surroundings and the age in which he was exposed; in his place, his time, he had been neither a monster nor unnatural, but nothing more than the current form of worship. He, Bongo, had had the misfortune to be catapulted, together with his congregation, through twenty, forty centuries, in a breath, on the magic carpet of greed, and put down in a day where he was not only obsolete, but repudiated. Men saw him with the sense of horror generated by a blasting view of their own very much earlier selves. For the difference between the negro, the Carabalíes, or Macua, and the Spaniards of the sixteenth century in Cuba was, at heart, historical in time only. They were members—we were all members—of one family. The innocence of a bare black, torn like a creeper from the support of his native tree, tatooed with necessary charms, medicines, against jungle fears and fevers, had more to dread from Amador de Lares than any later Christians owed to an arbitrarily imported savagery. What, in reality, occurred, was implied on the wide floor of the opera house, was that the negroes,

unable to change their simplicity as easily as they superficially diluted their skins, kept their innocent habits, their tastes in noise and religion and misconduct; but, in the dress of civilization, these took on the aspect of a grotesque defiled horror. With this, too, in an earnest effort to assimilate as much as possible of their enforced land, they caught such bright fragments of life as struck them—the glass beads and bits of gay cloth—and copied them prodigiously. The confusion which followed was a tragedy in the comic spirit—a discordant mingling that provoked laughter quickly stopped by a deeper understanding and by pity. The past vital still; with the entrance of the African slave into the West it was exactly as though a figure in the paint and feathers of voodoo had been thrust into a polite salon.

The spectacle had none of the comfortable features of a mere exhibition; for the revulsion came from a spiritual shudder in the beings of the onlookers; while the other injured individuals saw that, as clothes, the crude partial imitation of a rooster was insufficient. They, the latter, commendably hurried into trousers and pot hats, into satin trains and pink tulle and white kid gloves; but the transition was too hurried, too optimistic, and the resulting incongruity. . . . I was not a student of ethnology, I had no theory of races, but, gazing down from my box, it seemed to me

that yesterday could not be instantly combined with to-day; it was evident that there was no short way by a long and painful business of evolution.

Nothing more unfortunate could well be imagined, for, in the retributive manner I had already mentioned, the Africa buried in the West, so long forgotten, took life again, and the danger to everyone had been acute through a long period of Havana's years. We, in temperate zones, in weathers that had no need of the protection of a special dark pigment, had been lucky; but we were trying our luck very severely by subjecting it to the old potencies not yet entirely lost. The danzon was, actually, in a way beyond legislation, a masked ball in black and white, where the unmasking was involuntary and fateful.

One, I thought, spoiled the other, like an incomplete experiment in chemistry where nothing but an opaque liquid and an intolerable stench was evolved. Perhaps, with acute necessity, a successful clear result would reward the future with peace; but it wouldn't happen in my knowledge; I hadn't a thing in the world to do with it. What occurred to me then was the useful fact that the present scene afforded the right, the only, ending for my story, The Bright Shawl. It would have to be tragic, but only indirectly; nothing, I had decided, should happen to my principal character beyond a young moment of supreme romance. No, the

mishap, death, must envelop his friend, the patriotic Cuban. He'd be killed by a Spanish officer, through a woman—a woman in the bright shawl of the dancer that had been preserved as a memento of tender regard.

Some arrangement was necessary, perhaps a prostitute. Well—I had seen her, in virginal white muslin, with the weight of her head, its oval flattened by the hand of China, her heavy hair, inclined on its slender neck; a figure, in my pages, impassively fateful, remote as I had seen her seated in a gay company. That finished the story, for the youthful American, after a vain public effort to secure for himself the dignity of an heroic end, would be ignominiously deported from Cuba. I had been often asked how I arrived at my plots, but more often accused of never reaching an intelligible plan, and, until now, I'd been incapable of giving an explanation satisfactory even to myself; but here was one accounted for to a considerable degree. It had begun by an involuntary attachment to a city, to Havana; and the emotions brought into being had crystallized into a plan, for me, unusually concise.

There was a temptation, to be avoided, to tell it in the first person; a version that had come to be disliked almost as universally as a set of letters. Some celebrated stories had been written that way —Youth—but I felt that it was an unnecessary

charge on sympathy. While the creation of character was no longer the tyrant it had been, a certain air of veracity was most desirable, and the limited scope of a single intelligence discussing, explaining, himself was too marked. The great trouble with the romantic novels up to the very present had been that there was never a doubt of the ultimate happiness of all who should be happy, and the overwhelming misery of those who should be miserable. No peril was the father of a thrill, because from its inception it was plainly impotent to harm the lovely and the brave. The pleasure had from witnessing a dexterous job was lost in an artifice that seldom approached an art. But we'd improved that, an improvement expressed in the utter loss of the word hero : no man, nor woman, was now entirely safe in the hands of his romantic author; the two manners had come creditably together.

I had become, subconsciously, interested in a girl pausing on the floor, and, in response to my scrutiny, she glanced up with a shadowy smile. I gazed with instant celerity and fixedness at the ceiling, then at the upper boxes opposite, since below indiscretion was laid like a trail of powder, of explosive rice powder. There was no cutting in at that ball. She was more than charming, too, with her mixed blood evident in her carriage, her indolence, rather than in feature. She wore blue,

a wisely simple dress that showed small feet, like butterflies in their lightness, and a narrow instinctive black velvet band on her throat.

An air of sadness rested on her, on, principally, a superiority anyone could see. Her fan opened and shut in a thin, pointed hand. A maid, I told myself, reflecting the aristocracy of the closets of delicate clothes in her charge, scented from the gold-stoppered bottles of her mistress. She was another phase of what had been going on at such length through my mind, a different catastrophe since she was denied the reward of the virtues in either of the races that had made her. In Boston she would have become a blue-stocking, a poet singing in minor cadence to traditional abolitionists become dilettantes, but in Cuba, tormented by the strains of the danzon:

There, her flax burning in resentment and despair, she might be extinguished in the tide restlessly sweeping to the troubled coast of Birrajos; or, at Havana, carried into the secrets of the Ñañigos; in the black cabildo of that society provision was made for a woman.

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It was significant that the first organization of Ñañiguismo in Cuba was purely African, for the hatred of its members, Carabalíes, for the white race made the admission of even mulattos

impossible. This society—tierra or juego—was formed during the administration of General Tacón, in the village of Regla, and called Apapá Efi. It was, against the protests of its originators at sharing the secret with too many, enlarged, and spread through the outskirts of Havana. There the mulattos greatly outnumbered the blacks, and they formed a society of their own, its oath sworn in Ancha del Norte Street, named Ecobio Efó Macarará. They insisted on a common brotherhood and their right of entering the fambas, the ceremonial rooms; but there was a determined opposition, open battle and murder in Perseverancia and Lagunas Streets. After this there was a general meeting at Marianao, the early bar to colour, as distinguished from black, removed, and the infusion of the dark ritual of Efi into white blood began. When, ten years after, an indiscriminate society, the Ecobio Efó, was terminated by the authorities, Spanish nobles and professional men were assisting in the rites.

What had started upon the African river Oldan as a tribal religion took on, in Havana, a debased version of Rome, and the veneration of Santa Barbara was added to the supreme worship of Ecue, a figure vaguely parallel to the Holy Ghost, created in the sounding of a sacred drum. And what, equally, in the Carabalíe Bricamo was Dibó (God) became in Cuba an organization of criminals

and finally, when its more obvious aspects were stamped out, a corrupt political influence. There, in the clearest possible manner, was traced the eventual effect of so much heralded superiority, such enormous advantages, on native belief.

There could be no doubt, though, of the fact that, in any pretence of civilization, the Ñañigos were detrimental; it was unavoidable that they should have degenerated into a savage menace, not only in overt acts, which were not lacking, but in practices of mental and emotional horror. Their ceremony, with its strange vocables and distortions of meaning, the obscene words that were but symbols for obscenities beyond imagination, the character of their dance which gave them the name arrastrados, men who dragged themselves, reptilian, on the ground, all combined in a poison like a gas sweeping from the morass of the past. It held, beneath its refuge and defiance of society, the appeal of a portentous secret, bound in blood, the fascination, the fetishism, of orgiastic rituals, and, under that, stronger still, delirious barbarity.

Its legend was not different from the others which formed the primitive bases of subsequent elaborate beliefs; the miracle, with an attending baptism, was consummated by a woman, Sicanecua, who found a crying fish—the fish was a sacred Christian sign—in her jar of water. In recognition of this she was sacrificed and her blood put to a holy use,

and the fish skinned for the drum, sounded by the fingers, used in his praise. Here Ecue, the divine, was baptized by Efó in the Oldan, who in turn signed his disciple. And about that tradition, guarded—with its instrument—in the altar, Ecue sese, the degenerate elements and characters of modern Ñañíguismo gathered. There were, necessarily, changes in the Cuban form of worship—the skin of a goat was substituted for the unprocurable variety of fish, and the timbre of the original drum secured by an artifice. The need, as well, of finding another anointment than human blood, difficult to procure in Havana, led to the sacrifice of the rooster or a goat. This, now, had a crucifix, with the profession that God, Dibó, must be over everything, and a sacramental singing; but not the *Te Deum* or *Laudes*. . . . Efore sisí llamba, and the reply Ho Isueribó éngomo . . . Mocongo! while the Empegó, the clerk of the service, shifted brightly coloured curtains and enveloping handkerchiefs, and marked with yellow chalk the head and body and palms of the initiates.

A diablito had in charge the offices of the catechism—Come with me; where did you leave your feet; where I left my head! Enter where Bongó is and cry with your brother! Look at your brother, because they want to choke him. He conducted the sacrifice of the goat, which, in a memorial of Guinea, was eaten with pointed sticks,

with the drink, Mucuba, made from sugar-cane rum and bitter broom. A strange procession followed, led by the Insue, with a woman in a shift, Sicanecue, and the diablito skipping backward. The sese, a silver crucifix with four black feathers, was carried, and later the remains of the feast were thrown into a cemetery.

The effort to end Ñañiguismo in Havana began in 1875, when its gatherings were forbidden; but, deeply traditional, it flourished in hidden places, in the jail where Ñañigos were confined and the cellars of Jesús Maria. Long before that the poet Placido had been killed, within a few years the Llamba named Hand on the Ground was judicially executed; and following the assassinations during the carnival of eighteen hundred and sixty-five, sweeping deportations were enforced. In Maloja Street, a juego, Acaniran Efó Primero, with officers drawn from reputable quarters, was surprised; the next year the Abacuá Efô was exterminated; a public clash of diablitos resulted in apprehensions; and twenty-five Ñañigos were taken on Vista Hermosa Street.

It was, in reality, Africa in Havana, brought against its wish and to its tragic misfortune; and, planted in an alien soil, but among a common genus, the mysteries of religion, it grew into an aberration of all that gave it birth. Aside from this its significance, for me, lay in its amazing language, an idiom, specifically, composed of the

Carabalíe Bricamó and a Spanish without articles or conjunctions, equally incapable of exact images or the expression of abstract thought. But, taking the place of its omissions, was a congealing power of suggestion, of creating, through, apparently, no more than the jumbling of common terms and sounds, sensations of abject dread. The four bishops of the ritual, in their order, were Insué, Illamba, Mocongo, Empegó. In Ñañiguismo man was "momban," an idiot was "sansguerê," a knife "icuá rebesine," a pistol "etombre," immortality "embigüí," the night "erufie," war "ochangana," the sun "fansón," and worms "cocorico." The language took short, rigid forms, phrases, it had little, if any, plasticity: "amandido amanllurube" (the day goes and the night comes), "efiquefi que buton efique Ename onton Ellego Efimeremo Iboito, Eurico sangacurici eurico sanga quimagua sanga ñampé, ñampé sanga mariba" (the owl drinks the blood of the dead and flies to the sea).

The terms of the acts of worship were particularly heavy, sultry, and held in their sound alone the oppressive significance of fetishes as black as the night from which they were shaped. The minister of death to Sinanecua, a ceremony which became traditional, was named Cuañon-Araferrobré, and the act of sacrifice the Acuá Meropó. The singers before the altar, making visible the sacred stick Bastón Mocongo, intoned: "Mocongo Machevere,

Mosongo moto cumbaba eribo," and "Erendio basi Bome" (I believe in God and God is great); with, at the last, silencing the profession of faith, the voice of the drum, tarinibongó.

The Ñañigos had been driven from the streets through which, at first, on King's Day, Dia Reyes, they were permitted, once a year, to parade with native costumes and instruments—atables and marugas and ecous, a flattened bell struck by a thin stick. Their fambás were destroyed and hysteria cooled; but I wondered about both the secretiveness and persistence of the primitive spirit and the delicate melancholy that veiled the girl so faintly tinged with Carabalie, resting below my box through the rasping strains of the danzon. Had her gain been greater than the loss, the ruin, of her simplicity? Had she, dragged abruptly from saurian shadows, been made white by an arbitrary papal sun?

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A glimmering dawn, faintly salt with the presence of the sea, was evident in the Parque Central when I walked the short distance, not more than a few steps, from the opera house to the Inglaterra, my head filled with the resonant bos and bongos of Ñañiguismo. Havana, for a moment, seemed like a cemetery—its own marble cemetery of Colon—where a black spirit, buried in a secret grave,

walked and would not be still. I speculated about that same spirit in another connection—in its influence on painting and music, on Western literature. It had affected dancing profoundly, making it, in the United States, almost wholly its own; and the Spanish, with whom, in the richness of a tradition and perfect expression, no others could compete, owed a great debt to Africa. Our music, too, it had influenced to such a degree that it was doubtful if we had any outside the beat of negro strains.

Stephen Foster, a great composer in that he had enclosed the whole sentiment of an age within his medium, was often but a paraphrase of a darker melody. Foster, like Havana, was Victorian, a period that dreamed of marble halls, set in a key impossible now, and yet, curiously, charged for an unsympathetic world with significant beauty. This negro contribution was, in a melancholy and minor key, the invariable tone of all primitive song; in poetry, as well, a lyrical poetry nearly approaching music, there was an analogous colouring between the race and its shadowed measures.

The reminiscent emotions that, with us, were mainly personal in the negro were tribal; he had not been individualized, brought to a separate consciousness; and, in consequence, his song, practically lacking in intellect, dealt only with instinctive feelings. Growing shrill with passion,

and sinking to the monotonous laments of formless sorrow, it belonged equally to all the men, the women who heard it—it was their voice and comprehensible triumph or pain, without artifice it wasn't artificial nor ever insincere; and, as a means of gold, a medium for lies, it had no existence. The voice of all, an instrument of natural beauty, shared by villages, its pure quality, brought in slave ships that rotted with their dead on the sea, gave the shallow and vitiated West a fresh earthen tonic chord.

The negro, naturally, hadn't grown more cheerful in his new imposed setting; and it was possible that his music had gained an added depth, at any rate for our perception, from the weight of banishment and shackles. He had not turned with any success to creative accomplishment that needed mental independence and courage, or to forms, like the novel, wholly modern. On the other side, the novel, with all its trumpeted young freedom, had never, with even relative truth, expressed the negro in the Americas. This, a subject of appalling splendour, had, in the United States, been turned over to the comic spirit and short impressions, stories, superficially, falsely, pathetic. The fact was, that we had enormously harmed the negro, and for that reason, in the familiar process of human self-esteem, nationally we were uneasy, resentful in his presence. We saw him, when we

escaped from absolute hatred, as a figure, a subject, without dignity; we lacked there the penetrative sympathy which was the soul of imaginative fiction. Such a novel, I thought, was perhaps of everything that offered the best worth writing.

Certainly nothing more difficult could be well attempted; my knowledge, in Havana and through the Ñañigos, had been perceptibly enlarged, and I was not unfamiliar with the State where, I decided, the story must be laid—not in Virginia, but upon a level grey reach of Louisiana, cut by tideless bayous and saturated with the fever of cane and cypress brakes. A bitter novel like the broom herb put in the ceremonial drink Mucuba, pages from which it would be hard to exclude a fury of hopelessness! And what an angry, disturbed, wasp-like hum it would provoke! No magazine, of course, would touch it—it would be sold, for a week or ten days, from under counters, and then we, my novel and myself, metaphorically burned. A magnificent project!

A huddle of cabins at the edge of a wall of black pines beyond a deep, ruined field—but perhaps this was South Carolina—infinitesimal ragged patches of corn, a sandy trail lost abruptly in the close forest, and half-naked portentous shapes. There would be a town back in the country with a desolate red square of great sprawling water-oaks smothered in hanging moss, a place at once old and raw, and

ugly with vindictive ignorance. . . . The negroes were infinitely happier in Havana, where the heat, the palms, were their own; and I was surprised that they didn't desert the United States in a body for a suaver spirit in the air and man. Cuba, to a large measure, with what final result I wasn't concerned, had absorbed the Moors. Havana made some denial of this, and prided itself, with entire justice where it was true, on unmixed Castilian blood; but the other was perceptible in the gate, the very whiteness, of Cuba's principal city—the whitest walls on earth. This didn't bother me, I liked Havana from its farthest view to its most intimate façade, and I was grateful to whatever had made it.

In my room the negro, with the danzon, faded from my mind; and I only paused to speculate dimly about his overwhelming preference, where a choice existed, for the Protestant religions instead of Roman Catholicism. I should have thought that the colour, the imagery and incense, of the Catholic Church would have been irresistible. Yet there were, in the United States, thousands of coloured Methodists and Baptists for one adherent of Rome. It might be that the hymns of Methodism, sufficiently melancholy and barbarous in figure, God knew, were the reason, the character of the hymns and congregational singing, the loud, pictorial shouts. The later religion of the negroes,

in addition to what I had already considered, was a subject to be avoided; but running through my mind was the memory that in Richmond, not long ago, it was common in the evenings of spring for bands of negroes to go through the streets singing spirituals and constantly gathering others who dropped their work, their responsibilities, to join the passing chorus of hope.

That was lost now, I understood, a vanished custom, killed by self-consciousness; but it would have been a fine thing to hear, approaching and receding through the dusk, a stirring resinous volume or a mere vibrant echo, a dying whisper. Perhaps that, a dying whisper, would be the solving of the whole tragic difficulty—disease, and winter, and relentless natural laws. The latter moved with great deliberation through unlimited centuries, but the impatience of men demanded instant release from trouble. They wanted black black, and white white, with no transition, no blurring of the edges; this was their dream, but they constantly defeated it, betrayed their ideal. Yes, it might be that the humility of that defeat, in the far future, would accomplish a universally white city. Only one other way offered, a different humanity from any which had yet appeared outside rare individuals . . . but that vision seemed, to me, as fantastic as the sentence in Carabalie Bricamo that gave it expression, " Eruco en llenison comunbairan

abase otete alleri pongo (We of this world are all together.) The truth was, honestly at heart, that I couldn't commit myself to all, or even a quarter, of what this would have demanded. Impersonally I was able to see that, as an idea, it was superb, I realized that something of it must inform my pages; but it was useless to pretend that I could begin to carry it out, or that I was, in practice, a Christian. I was tired, and my thoughts grew confused, but dimly in my mind was again the consciousness of the remote fate of the creative writer, an individual without even the desire to be a part of that for which he cried.

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Certainly I had no marked love of humanity the following morning, caught with a small mob in a narrow passage of the wharf where I was waiting to board the steamer for Key West. I was between the water and a wooden partition, the heat was savage, and a number of youthful marines, returning home from Camagüey, were indulging in a characteristic humour—the dealing of unsuspected blows, of jarring force, among themselves. They shoved each other, in a crowd shoulder to shoulder, disregarding entirely the indirect results of their vigour, and exchanged threats of fulminating violence. They were not more annoying than the others, but only more evident; and, as the adver-

tised time of departure was past by an hour, and then a second hour, and the sun found its way into our walled space, even the marines subsided. Every trace of dignity, in that heat, ran away from the people about me; while, on the whole, they were uncomplaining, even relatively considerate of others' discomforts, wondering, with weary smiles, when the boat would be off. I had no such kindly promptings . . . I hated them all, the ugliness of the women and the men's dull or merely sharp faces, with an intensity that wasn't normal. When I was very young indeed, scarcely past two, I had been nearly crushed in a throng after the Sesquicentennial parade in Philadelphia; long afterward I had been, to all practical purposes, asphyxiated in a train that broke down in an Apennine tunnel; as a result, I had an unreasoning fear of crowded bodies or limited space; and this dread before long, on the Havana wharf, turned into an acute aversion for every individual and thing about me.

The surrounding insistent good nature developed in flashes of exchanged homely wit, varied by the attitudes of restraint, and, of them both, I couldn't tell which I resented more. The present position of the waiting people, the long exposure to the intolerable sun, was the result of their patience, of that and their personal inefficiency reflected in their official management. All the bad Governments in the world, the dishonesty and universal

muddles, were nothing more than monuments to the immeasurable stupidity and greed of the people; they were not betrayed politically by powerful and unscrupulous parties and men, but by themselves, perpetually and always by their own laziness and superstition and jealousy.

The Cubeños, the original inhabitants of Cuba, were parcelled in the bondage of encomiendas, exterminated by the passion of the Spanish Crown for gold; when they had been sacrificed Africa was raked by slavers for labour in the mines and planting; beneath every movement, instigated by hope or supported by returns, riches were the incentive and power. Men had never, within history and their secret hearts, cared for anything else: an ineradicable desire. There was a facile public gabble about the qualities of the spirit, about soul; but the solid fact of money, both as an abstraction and what conspicuously it brought, was what the people worshipped, wanted, what they schemed or stole for, or in the service of which they performed the most heroic toil.

This was not, necessarily, an ignoble or negligible pursuit, but it was corrupted by an attending hypocrisy which forced a fervent denial, the pretence of an utterly different purpose, to be worn like a cloak. It was possible that, admitted, the sovereignty of gold would be the most beneficial rule applicable to man. It was pre-eminently the

symbol, the signature, of power; with the late sugar crops it had revolutionized Cuba. Havana was for the moment, in a very strong sense, the capital of the world, and the visible mark of that was the stream of automobiles on the Prado and Malecon; individually money was counted by the million—the recognition, the desired reward, of the fact that Cuba controlled a necessity of life. The instinct to profit by such terms of fortune was deeper than any charitable impulse, there was a tendency to speculate in wheat more general than the impulse to give loaves to the starving.

There was a sudden surge toward the gang-plank of the *City of Miami*, and I was borne on to the steamer, away from Havana, in an exasperated and bitter spirit. I had entered the harbour happily, saturated by its beauty, but I was leaving blind to the marble walls on the blue water. However, it was cooler on an upper deck; and, with my back uncompromisingly turned on humanity, on my fellow-passengers, I picked out from the panorama of the city dropping away over a sea like a tranquil illusion of respite between stubborn realities, across the harbour, diminishing in its narrow entrance, familiar buildings and marks. Havana vanished, I thought, far more rapidly than it had come into view; soon nothing of Cuba could be seen but the dark green hills and thinly printed silhouettes of mountains. I had it, though, in my memory;

Havana was now woven into the fibre of my being.

The Inglaterra Hotel took its place with all the remembered spots where I had lived; the bare pine-sealed room in the Virginia mountains, the tall, narrow house in Geneva, the courtyard in the Via San Gallo, the brick house in a suburb from which, in a rebellion against every circumstance of my life, I had escaped. I recalled days on end when I had tried to write without the ability to form a single acceptable sentence, when the floor was heaped and littered with pages crushed and flung away. Then, it had seemed, I'd get nowhere, I'd see, do, nothing . . . Havana was a singularly lovely city. A rush of small mementoes of its life flooded my mind—the aroma of the cigars, the coolness of the Telegrafo Café and the savour of its Daiquiri cocktails, the burning strip of sunlight that, at noon, found its way into Obispo Street. It was still possible to find Ron Bacardi in the United States. I was carrying back a large provision of exceedingly fine cigars, not from the Larrañaga factory, but a slender Corona, a shape specially rolled for a discrimination as delicate as any in Cuba. Yet, away from Havana, they wouldn't taste the same, in the United States they'd deteriorate and, where I lived, there were no fresh, no emerald green, limes, and without them a Daiquiri was robbed of its inimitable flavour.

But what, more than those, I'd miss was the atmosphere of Havana itself, the gay urbanity and festive lightness of tone. It had almost wholly escaped the modern passion for reform changing America, pretty much all the Western world, into a desert of precept and correction; in many senses Havana was an oasis in an aridity spreading day by day. Any improvement wouldn't occur during my life, the habit of lies and self-delusion had become a fundamental part of society; and all I could hope for was the discovery of rare individuals, and cities in which existence was more than a penalty for having been born. I wanted them as a relaxation, as short escapes from a tyranny from which, really, I was powerless to turn.

I didn't want to live in Havana, nor to be surrounded by exceptional people; for they were both enemies of what, above everything, I wanted to do—to write into paper and ink some permanence of beauty. For that Chester County and the solid stone block of my house were necessary, a temperate climate indispensable. At heart, in spite of my constant fault-finding, my threats of leaving, I was bound by associations deeper than mere intelligence. No, nothing so powerful as an obsession had overtaken me approaching Havana; I was not, in actuality, an adventurer, but only a seeker for charm, for memories, to carry back to the low window to which I had already referred. The charm

of Havana was its strangeness, the vividness of its sudden impression on me, the temporary freedom, grace, it offered. It was characteristic of freedom, too, that in the end it became slavery; while slavery had, at times, extraordinarily the appearance of freedom. Not a month ago I had dropped, with a sigh, a gasp of relief, a pen heavier than anything else on earth, and now I could scarcely restrain the eagerness—the confidence, at last, of success—with which I wanted to take it up again.

* * * * *

When I turned, looking back, Cuba had vanished, sunk below the line of the sea. The Gulf Stream was indigo, along the side of the steamer foam hissed with a sharp whiteness, and at the bow miniature rainbows hung shimmering in the spray. The perpetual soft clouds of the Gulf Stream were very high and faint. In my imagination Havana assumed a magic, a mythical, state—a vision that, I was certain, had no absolute ponderable existence. It was a city created on a level bright tide, under lustrous green hills, for the reward of cherished and unworldly dreams. It was the etherealized spectacle of the sanguine hopes of all the conquistadores who had set sail for the rubies of Cipango; they had great desires of white marble cities in which the women were lovely and dark, and where gold was beaten into the forms of every day.

They, different from the frugal Dutch, making, with no less daring, the Eastern Passage in the interest of associated merchants and of commonwealths, sailed, in a more picturesque phrase, for their Catholic Majesties and for Spain. The Dutch names, Bonteke and Schouten and Roggeveen, had a solid bartering sound compared with Francesco de Cordoba and Miruelo and Angel de Villafañe. Holland had its tradition of the sea, sufficiently coloured with extravagant adventure; but its spirit was sober, the visions of its navigators would never have lingered in a marble city.

Havana was, perhaps, a Saragossa of souls, with the acts and thoughts of its early vivid years, of Careñas, for ever held in the atmosphere, audible in the restless volume of sound that was never still. Its history had flashed through my mind with the turn of a wheel, its duration seeming no more than the opening and shutting of a hand; but now I had an impression not of the transient, not of walls and names and voices, but of qualities impersonal and permanent, of something which, while individual men died, resisted death. It had existence, that was, as long as humanity drew a continuous thread of memory through time. Havana had, outwardly, changed from its first huddle of bohios and fortified tower; but the form it had taken, so different from the discovered reality, had, beyond any question, that odd similitude to Marco Polo's reports of the Grand Khanate. Its final architecture, pseudo-

classic, was more abstract than any other imaginable order; all the dress that had ever paraded through the successive stages of the city—the Caciques, girdled in feathers, the brocades of Maria de Toledo and her lady-in-waiting, Captain Godoy in steel and lace, the floating crinoline of the Prince of Anglona's year, painted black Ñañigos—was equally possible against a background at once fantastic and restrained.

There was never a more complex spirit than Havana's, no stranger mingling of chance and climate and race had ever occurred; but, remarkably, a unity of effect had been the result, such a singleness as that possessed by an opera, where, above the orchestra and the settings and the voices, there was perceptible a transcending emotion created from an artificial and illogical means. For while Havana had a history dignified in its sweep, it could never be long dominant, either as a city or in its men; it had ruled an island, but not the world; it had never been—in that latitude—a Captain-General of a hemisphere. No, it wasn't symphonic, but the lesser, more pictorial, performance; it had, I thought, very much the appearance of a stage.

This, however, was not a denial of the reality of the blood it shed, nor of the sharpness and danger of its emotions; it had been a profusely bloody city with tropical passions often reaching ideals of sacrifice. It had, too, suffered the iron of oppres-

sion, spoken its word for liberty, the state which, never to be realized, by its bare conception elevated life. Now, in addition, it was a great port . . . and yet, though it might have been the fault of my limitations, I continued to see Havana as more dramatic than essential; I heard persistently the overture with the themes of Seville, the crying native airs, the drums of Guinea played with the fingers. The shining crooked bay was filled by the plate ships of Mexico and Peru with their high-decked sterns and yellow cannon. The curtain fell to rise again on Don Miguel Tacôn.

It was impossible to determine what I had seen of Havana and what was merely my reflected self, even hard to decide if I had seen Havana objectively at all, since my attitude toward it had been so purely personal. My memory was composed of what I'd experienced and the reflections, the thoughts, that had given birth to; and, of them, the latter were the more real, solider than the Prado, more tangible than the dining-room of the Inglaterra. Without them Havana would have been meaningless, sterile, simply a museum about which nothing could be written but a catalogue. It was its special charm to be charged with sensations rather than facts, a place where facts—not, of a kind, absent—could be safely ignored. Further than that, ignoring them was, for any measure of honesty, absolutely needful; the pedantic spirit in Havana was fatal.

What, almost entirely, I'd been told to view, expected to enjoy, I'd avoided; yet not that, for it implied a deliberate will, and such a planning or triumph of character had been as far as possible from my drifting; I had seen what I preferred and done what I was; anyone, following me in Havana, could have judged me with exaction. I had spent money lavishly—as though I were rich instead of extravagant—for visible returns that would have only provoked the other passengers on the *City of Miami*. They, where they were not driven to staterooms by the dipping of the steamer, were vociferous with knowledge about Cuba, their bags were heavy with souvenirs—the Coty perfumes from France and the table-linen of the Canary Islands. The pervasive salesmen, flushed with success and Scotch whisky, smoking the cigars long familiar to them in northern hotels, hinted together of the Parisian girls and criollos, to whom they referred as creoles in the meaning and vocabulary of American burlesque. Some officials of transportation and sugar manipulators sat aside, with double Coronas, exchanging in short sentences their hardness of knowledge, speaking of Cuba as an estancia of which they were absentee owners. A flight of sail fish skittered over the sea, and the clouds following the Gulf Stream turned rose with the dropping of the sun; the horizon bore a suggestion of Florida. Once Cuba, regarded as the shore of India, had been the centre of the West and

Florida no more than a chimera: how ironic such errors and reversals were. Now it was Juana that was legendary, and Florida resembled the significant hooked finger of an imponderable power. The day slid rapidly into water that had lost its blueness for expanses of chalky shallow green, and the flat roofs of Key West and masoned arches became slowly visible across the sea, and a stir of departure filled the decks.

I was, for a moment, depressed at the definite leaving behind of Havana, for the tranquil passage had seemed only an extension of its spirit, and by the imminent reshouldering of my burden of responsibility. I had never wanted that, but, without choice, it had been abruptly thrust on me, a responsibility impossible of fulfilment and which I couldn't put down. When I was young I had looked in vain for a perpetual Havana, hoping for nothing more, and now, when my youth was dead, I had found the perfection of my desire. But, as always, the discovery was too late; I couldn't stay in the covered paseos, the plazas with flambeau-trees and royal palms; nor idle in a room of Moorish tiles with a dripping fountain, over a magic drink; my time for the actualities of charming liberty, the possession of uncounted days, was gone. But this mood was nothing more than a gesture, a sentiment, thrown back to romance.

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